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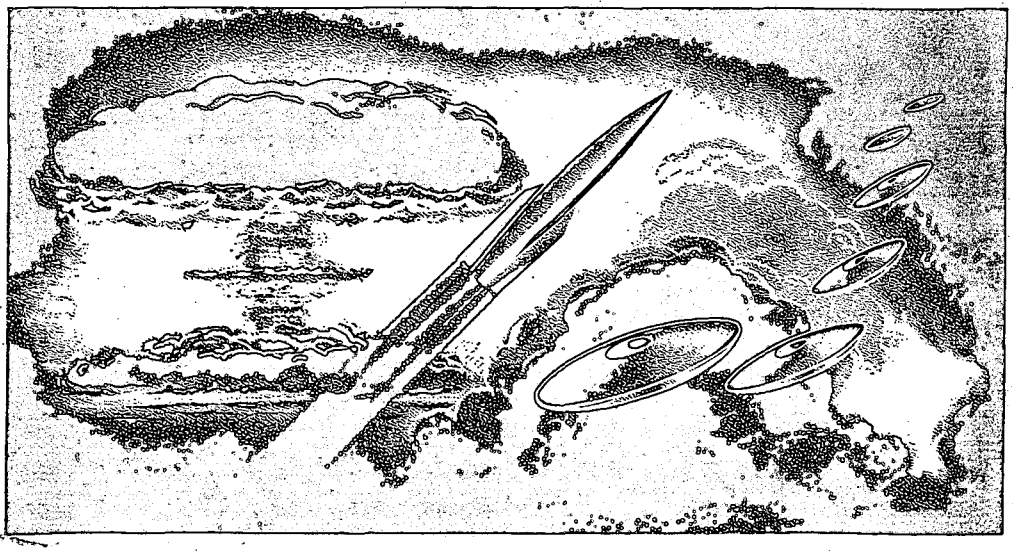

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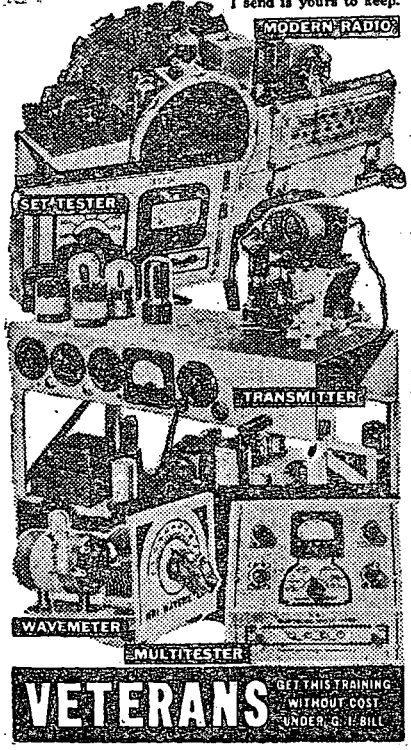

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THE EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK
By The Editor 6
TOOTHSOME ...
By Jon Barry 92
MOVIE X-RAYS
By L. A. Burt 92
ASTRO GLOBE
By William Karney 93
THE LABYRINTH
By Sandy Miller 93
IN THE DEEPS ...
By Carter T. Wainwright 114
HOLLYWOOD IN SPACE
By Leslie Phelps 115
BUILDING BLOCKS
By Milton Matthew 115
TELERAPPORT
By J. R. Marks 125
BOOK WORM
By A. Morris 125
SPACE SCHOOL
By A. T. Kedzie 136
SKY-HOOKS
By W. R. Chase 137
UNKNOWN WAR
By H. R. Stanton 149
UNWILLING EXILE
By June Lurie 149
JOYBOY—3000!
By Lynn Standish 150
CONDEMNED!
By Cal Webb 150
THE TELEPATHIC MURDER
By Dan Corliss 151
READER'S PAGE
By The Readers 152
FACTS OF THE FUTURE
By Lee Owens 156

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VOLUME 12 NUMBER 2

All Stories Complete

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Illustrated by Bill Terry
It was only a child's toy, but its jewel-eyes held a terrible power waiting to be released . . .

DOOM SHIP (Novelette—10,200) ..... by Robert Moore Williams 94
Illustrated by H. W. McCauley
Earthmen had reason to fear the Roum on Venus—for visitors were welcomed with—death! . . .

NULL F (Short—5,000) ..... by Peter Worth 116
Illustrated by Bill Terry
Will the man of the future have a sense of humor? Possibly, but it may be a peculiar kind . . .

MYSTERY ON PLUTO (Short—5,300) ..... by Ward Fleming 126
Illustrated by Bill Terry
Faltronium was impossible to steal. But somebody forgot to tell the thief who stole it! . . .

THE FRIENDLY WOLF (Short—6,000) ..... by Craig Browning 138
Illustrated by Leo Ramon Summers
It wasn't that the wolf was friendly — he just didn't have a heart of his own to hate with! . . .

Front cover painting by Robert Gibson Jones, illustrating a scene from "The Dreaming Jewels."

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

WE THINK it's about time that somebody said a few things about the field of science-fantasy as it is today. We'd like to take a few minutes in this column to present our views on the subject, and certainly FA, as one of the leaders in the field is in a position to see fairly clearly what is going on.

IT WASN'T so very many years ago that the only really frequent market for science-fantasy was in the pulps (such as FA and AS). But you will have noted by now that the genre has successfully invaded the book field and the so-called slick publications with circulations numbered in the millions. This is all very wonderful. We are very happy to see the generally awakened interest in our favorite field of fiction. But we think the time is ripe for a word of protest—and a warning.

WE VIEW with some degree of alarm the current deluge of books being offered to the American reading public under the imprint of science-fantasy. These books, by and large are either anthologies of shorter length stories from the various pulp magazines, or pieces from the musty files of authors long dead—stories that can be found generally among the shelves of any public library. Then too, those books that are classified as novels, are nothing more for the main part, than long-length works that have appeared in the pages of pulps at some previous date. Sum total of the book market then: reprints.

NOW WHAT is wrong with that? Are we decrying the very types of stories we have been publishing? Frankly, yes—insofar as interesting the vast uninitiated audience the book buyer represents. It isn't that the material being published is unworthy of public consumption, but that this material, mainly, was written for a pulp audience, in a pulp style. We do not mean to infer here that the pulp readers are of any lesser intelligence than the book reader. The simple fact is that the readers of science-fantasy magazines are accustomed to the highest flights of imagination an author can achieve. They are, in fact, usually ahead of him in that respect. And as a consequence, the writer of a pulp novel may safely subjugate background and general polish and concentrate on the action of the story he presents.

WE FEEL that this is not the type of material that should be offered to the book buyer as his introduction to the field of science-fantasy. No attempt is being made to supply an intelligent approach to science-fantasy for this vast uninitiated but currently interested audience. Books are being presented to them in much the guise as a contractor who presents a house to a prospective buyer by showing him the completed roof with no mention or visual evidence of a foundation or even skeletal framework. You don't buy a house under such circumstances. Which brings us to the warning.

IT WOULD seem that the prominent publishers today who are invading this highly promising literary field, have approached it with an eye toward making a fast dollar in a temporary vogue. While this practice will undoubtedly achieve its primary goal, it will just as well, unless some intelligent caution is observed, defeat its greater purpose—that of solidifying the tastes of the general book buyer to this little known *mets*.

NOW IS THE time for publishers to marshal the talents of top writers in the genre. Select works for a so-called "science-fiction library" with an eye not only to popular appeal, but to general literary merit—with the proper development of a novel of this type slanted in much the same manner as a publisher would consider the average serious title on his list. The book buyer may succumb for the moment and buy a book in the new *fad*; holding this reader for a new and enlarged market is another matter entirely.

AN ATTEMPT should be made to develop science-fantasy, rather than exploit it. This can be done by encouraging *new* work of mature stature. The anthology and other reprint practices in the book field have accomplished their only goal: to awaken interest in an untapped audience. Now that the eyes have swung in our direction let's not alienate them with the leftovers of our fantasy table; bring on the main course, let the chef create new and palate stirring dishes—food that will linger in the mind and become a preferred delicacy.

SCIENCE-FANTASY stands on the threshhold of a new era of popularity. Writers are willing to cooperate. It remains for the publisher to give him the nod ..... WLH

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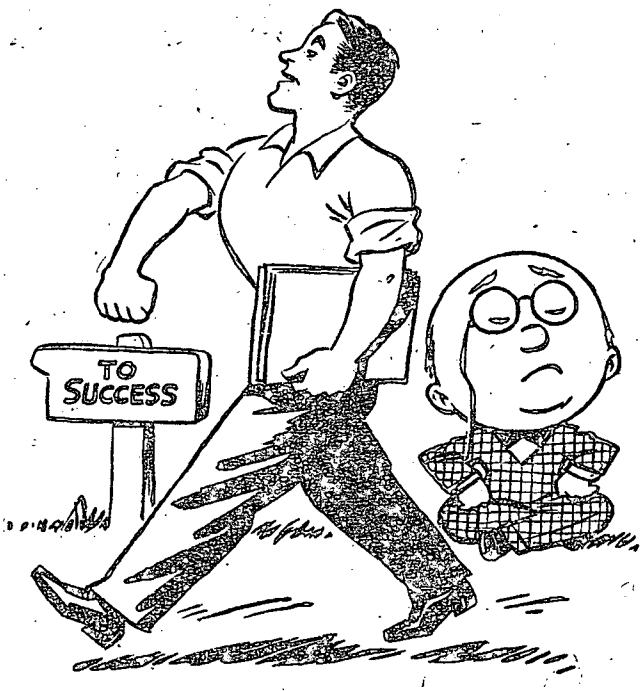
How to pass a genius



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The DREAMING JEWELS

By THEODORE STURGEON

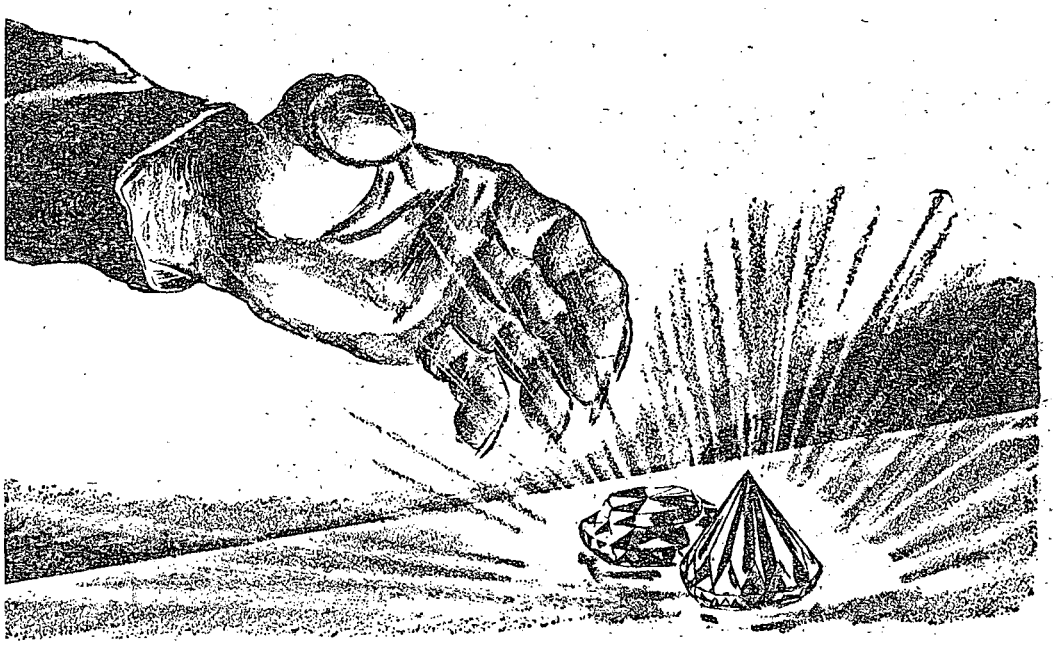
Was it possible the eyes of a toy held a secret that science never dreamed of? And if not—what were the strange jewel-eyes? . . .

THEY CAUGHT the kid doing something disgusting out under the bleachers at the high-school stadium, and he was sent home from the grammar school across the street. He was eight years old then. He'd been doing it for years.

In a way it was a pity. He was a nice kid, a nice-looking kid too, though not particularly outstanding. There were other kids, and teachers, who liked him a little bit, and some who disliked him a little bit; but everyone jumped on him when it got around. His name was Horty—Horton, that is—Bluett. Naturally he caught blazes when he got home.

He opened the door as quietly as he could, but they heard him, and hauled him front and center into the living room where he stood flushing, with his head down, one sock around his ankle, and his arms full of books and a catcher's mitt. He was a good catcher, for an eight-year-old. He said, "I was—"

"We know," said Armand Bluett. Armand was a bony individual with a small mustache and cold wet eyes. He clapped his hands to his forehead and then threw up his arms. "My God, boy, what in Heaven's name



His huge grotesque figure lumbered toward the table where the jewels glittered . . .

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made you do a filthy thing like that?" Armand Bluett was not a religious man, but he always talked like that when he clapped his hands to his head, which he did quite often.

Horty did not answer. Mrs. Bluett, whose name was Tonta, sighed and asked for a highball. She did not smoke, and needed a substitute for the smoker's thoughtful match-lit pause when she was at a loss for words. She was so seldom at a loss for words that a fifth of rye lasted her six weeks. She and Armand were not Horton's parents. Horton's parents were upstairs, but the Bluetts did not know it. Horton was allowed to call Armand and Tonta by their first names.

"Might I ask," said Armand icily, "how long you have had this nauseating habit? Or was it an experiment?"

Horty knew they weren't going to make it easy on him. There was the same puckered expression on Armand's face as when he tasted wine and found it unexpectedly-good.

"I don't do it much," Horty said, and waited.

"May the Lord have mercy on us for our generosity in taking in this little swine," said Armand, clapping his hands to his head again. Horty let his breath out. Now that was over with. Armand said that every time he was angry. He marched out to mix Tonta a highball.

"Why did you do it, Horty?" Tonta's voice was more gentle only because her vocal cords were more gently shaped than her husband's. Her face showed the same implacable cold.

"Well, I—just felt like it, I guess." Horty put his books and catcher's mitt down on the footstool.

TONTA TURNED her face away from him and made an unspellable, retching syllable. Armand strode back in, bearing a tinkling glass.

"Never heard anything like it in my life," he said scornfully. "I suppose it's all over the school?"

"I guess so."

"The children? The teachers too, no doubt. But of course. Anyone say anything to you?"

"Just Dr. Pell." He was the principal. "He said—said they could..."

"Speak up!"

Horty had been through it once. Why, why go through it all again? "He said the school could get along without f-filthy savages."

"I can understand how he felt," Tonta put in, smugly.

"And what about the other kids? They say anything?"

"Hecky brought me some worms. And Jimmy called me Sticky-tongue." And Kay had laughed, but he didn't mention that.

"Sticky-tongue. Not bad, that, for a kid. Ant-eater." Again the hand clapped against the brow. "My God, what am I going to do if Mr. Anderson greets me with 'Hi, Sticky-tongue!' Monday morning? This will be all over town, sure as God made little apples." He fixed Horty with the sharp wet points of his gaze. "And do you plan to take up bug-eating as a profession?"

"They weren't bugs," Horty said diffidently and with accuracy. "They were ants. The little brown kind."

Tonta choked on her highball. "Spare us the details."

"My God," Armand said again, "what'll he grow up as?" He mentioned two possibilities. Horty understood one of them. The other made even the sophisticated Tonta jump. "Get out of here."

Horty went to the stairs while Armand thumped down exasperatedly beside Tonta. "I've had mine," he said. "I'm full up to here. That

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brat's been the symbol of failure to me ever since I laid eyes on his dirty face. This place isn't big enough—*Horton!*"

"Huh."

"Come back here and take your garbage with you. I don't want to be reminded that you're in the house."

Horty came back slowly, staying out of Armand Bluett's reach, picked up his books and the catcher's mitt, dropped a pencil-box—at which Armand my-Godded again—picked it up, almost dropped the mitt, and finally fled up the stairs.

Once in his room, he sank down on the edge of the bed with his arms still full of his books. He did not close the door because there was none, due to Armand's conviction that privacy was harmful for youngsters. He did not turn on the light because he knew everything in the room, knew it with his eyes closed. There was little enough. Bed, dresser, closet with a cracked cheval glass. A child's desk, practically a toy, that he had long outgrown. In the closet were three oiled-silk dress-covers stuffed full of Tonta's unused clothes, which left almost no space for his.

His...

None of this was really his. If there had been a smaller room, he would have been shoved into it. There were two guest bedrooms on this floor, and another above, and they almost never had guests. The clothes he wore weren't his; they were concessions to something Armand called "my position in this town"; rags would have done if it weren't for that.

He rose, the act making him conscious of the clutter he still clutched in his arms. He put it down on the bed. The mitt was his, though. He'd bought it for seventy-five cents from the Salvation Army store. He got the money by hanging around Dempledorff's market and carrying packages for people, a dime a trip. He had thought Armand would be pleased; he was always talking about resourcefulness and earning ability. But he had forbidden Horty ever to do that again. "My God! People will think we are paupers!" So the mitt was all he had to show for the episode.

All he had in the world—except, of course, Junky.

HE LOOKED, through the half-open closet door, at the top shelf and its clutter of Christmas-tree lights (the Christmas tree was outside the house, where the neighbors could see—never inside), old ribbons, a lampshade, and—Junky.

He pulled the oversized chair away from the undersized desk and carried it—if he had dragged it, Armand would have been up the stairs two at a time to see what he was up to, and if it was fun, forbidden it—and set it down carefully in the closet doorway. Standing on it, he felt behind the leftovers on the shelf until he found the hard square bulk of Junky. He drew it out, a cube of wood, gaudily painted and badly chipped, and carried it to the desk.

Junky was the kind of toy so well-known, so well-worn, that it was not necessary to see it frequently, or touch it often, to know that it was there. Horty was a foundling—found in a park one late fall evening, with only a receiving blanket tucked about him. He had acquired Junky while he was at the Home, and when he had been chosen by Armand as an adoptee (during Armand's campaign for City Counsellor, which he lost, but which he thought would

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be helped along if it were known he had adopted a "poor little homeless waif") Junky was part of the bargain.

Horty put Junky softly on the desk and touched a worn stud at the side. Violently at first, then, with rusted-spring hesitancy, and at last defiantly, Junky emerged, a jack-in-the-box, a refugee from a more gentle generation. He was a Punch, with a chipped hooked nose which all but met his upturned, pointed chin. In the gulch between these stretched a knowing smile.

But all Junky's personality—and all his value to Horty—was in his eyes. They seemed to have been cut, back-faceted, from some leaded glass which gave them a strange, complex glitter, even in the dimmest room. Time and again Horty had been certain that those eyes had a radiance of their own, though he could never quite be sure.

He murmured, "Hi, Junky."

The jack-in-the-box nodded with dignity, and Horty reached and caught its smooth chin. "Junky, let's get away from here. Nobody wants us. Maybe we wouldn't get anything to eat, and maybe we'd be cold, but gee... Think of it, Junky. Not being scared when we hear *his* key in the lock, and never sitting at dinner while he asks questions until we have to lie, and—and all like that." He did not have to explain himself to Junky.

He let the chin go, and the grinning head bobbed up and down, and then nodded slowly, thoughtfully.

"They shouldn't 'a been like that about the ants," Horty confided. "I didn't *drag* nobuddy to see. Went off by myself. But that stinky Hecky, he's been watching me. An' then he sneaked off and got Mr. Carter. That was no way to do, now was it, Junky?" He tapped the head on the side of its hooked nose, and it shook its head agreeably. "I hate a sneak."

"You mean me, no doubt," said Armand Bluett from the doorway.

Horty didn't move, and for a long instant his heart didn't either. He half crouched, half cowered behind the desk, not turning toward the doorway.

"What are you doing?"

"Nothin'."

Armand belted him across the cheek and ear. Horty whimpered, once, and bit his lip. Armand said, "Don't lie. You are obviously doing something. You were talking to yourself, a sure sign of a degenerating mind. What's this—oh. Oh yes, the baby toy that came with you. Your estate. It's as repulsive as you are." He took it from the desk, dropped it on the floor, wiped his hand on the side of his trousers, and carefully stepped on Junky's head.

HORTY shrieked as if it were his head, not the toy's, which was being crushed, and leapt at Armand. So unexpected was the attack that the man was bowled right off his feet. He fell heavily and painfully against the bedpost, grabbed at it and missed, and went to the floor. He sat there for a moment grunting and blinking, and then his little eyes narrowed and fixed themselves on the trembling Horty. "Mmm—*hm!*" said Armand in a tone of great satisfaction, and rose. "You should be exterminated." He grasped the slack of Horty's shirt and struck him. He hit the boy's face, back and forth, as he spoke. "Homicidal, that's what you are. I was going to send you away to a school. But it isn't safe. The police will take care of you. They have a place for juvenile delinquents."

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He rushed the sodden child across the room and jammed him into the closet. "This will keep you safe until the police get here," he panted, and slammed the door. The hinge side of it caught three fingers of Horty's left hand.

At the boy's shriek of very real agony Armand snapped the door open again. "No use in your yelling. You— My God! What a mess. Now I suppose I'll have to get a doctor. There's no end—absolutely no end to the trouble you cause. Tonta!" He ran out and down the stairs. "Tonta!"

"Yes, Peaches."

"That young devil stuck his hand in the door. Did it on purpose, to excite sympathy. Bleeding like a stuck pig. You know what he did? He struck me. He attacked me, Tonta! It's not safe to have him in the house!"

"You poor darling! Did he hurt you?"

"A wonder he didn't kill me. I'm going to call the police."

"I'd better go up while you're phoning," said Tonta. She wet her lips.

But when she reached the room, Horty was gone. There was a lot of excitement for a while after that. At first Armand wanted to get his hands on Horty for his own purposes, and then he began to be afraid of what people might say if the boy gave his own garbled version of the incident. But a day went by, and a week, and a month, and then it was safe to look to heaven and say mysteriously, "He's in safe hands now, the poor little tyke," and people could answer, "I understand..." Everyone knew he was not Armand's child, anyway.

But Armand Bluett tucked one idea snugly away in the corner of his mind. That was to look out, in the future, for any young man with three fingers missing from his left hand.

CHAPTER II

THE HALLOWELLS lived at the edge of town, in a house that had only one thing wrong with it; it was at the intersection where the State Highway angled into the end of Main Street, so that the traffic roared night and day past both the front and back gates.

The Hallowell's taffy-headed daughter, Kay, was as full of social consciousness as only a seven-year-old can be. She had been asked to empty the trash, and as usual she opened the back gate a crack and peeped out at the highway, to see if anyone she knew would catch her at the menial task.

"Horty!"

He shrank into the fog-swirled shadows of the traffic-light standard.

"Horton Bluett, I see you."

"Kay..." He came to her, staying close to the fence. "Listen, don't tell nobody you saw me, huh?"

"But wh—oh. You're running away!" she blurted, noticing the parcel tucked under his arm. "Horty—are you sick?" He was white, strained. "Did you hurt your hand?"

"Some." He held his left wrist with his right hand, tightly. His left hand was wrapped in two or three handkerchiefs. "They was going to get the police. I got out the window onto the shed roof and hid there all afternoon. They was lookin' all over the street and everywhere. You won't tell?"

"I won't tell. What's in the package?"

"Nothin'."

If she had demanded it, grabbed at it, he would probably never have

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seen her again. Instead she said, "Please, Horty."

"You can look." Without releasing his wrist, he turned so she could pull the package out from under his arm. She opened it—it was a paper bag—and took out the hideous broken face of Junky. Junky's eyes glittered at her, and she squeaked. "What is it?"

"It's Junky. I had him since before I was born. Armand, he stepped on it."

"Is that why you're running away?"

"Kay! What are you doing out there?"

"Coming, Mother! Horty, I got to go. Horty, are you coming back?"

"Not *ever.*"

"Gee...that mister Bluett, he's so *mean...*"

"Kay Hallowell! Come in this instant. It's raining!"

"Yes, Mother! Horty, I wannit to tell you. I shouldn'ta laughed at you today. Hecky brought you the worms, and I thought it was a joke, thass all. I didn't know you really did eat ants. Gee... I et some shoe-polish once. That's nothin'."

Horty held out his crooked elbow and she carefully put the package under it. He said, as if he had just thought of it—and indeed he had—"I *will* come back, Kay. Someday."

"Kay!"

"'Bye, Horty." And she was gone, a flash of taffy hair, yellow dress, a bit of lace, changed before his eyes to a closed gate in a board fence and the sound of dwindling quick footsteps.

Horton Bluett stood in the dark drizzle, cold, but with heat in his ruined hand and another heat in his throat. This he swallowed, with difficulty, and, looking up, saw the broad inviting tailgate of a truck which was stopped for the traffic light. He ran to it, tossed his small bundle on it, and squirmed up, clawing with his right hand, trying to keep his left out of trouble. The truck lurched forward; Horty scrabbled wildly to stay on. The package with Junky in it began to slide back toward him, past him; he caught at it, losing his own grip, and began to slip.

SUDDENLY there was a blur of movement from inside the truck, and a flare of terrible pain as his smashed hand was caught in a powerful grip. He came very close to fainting with it; when he could see again he was lying on his back on the jolting floor of the truck, holding his wrist again, expressing his anguish in squeezed-out tears and little, difficult grunts.

"Gee, kid, you don't care how long you live, do you?" It was a fat boy, apparently his own age, bending over him, his bowed head resting on three chins. "What's the matter with your hand?"

Horty said nothing. He was quite beyond speech for the moment. The fat boy, with surprising gentleness, pressed Horty's hand away from the handkerchiefs and began laying back the cloth. When he got to the inner layer, he saw the blood by the wash of light from a street-light they passed, and he said "Man."

When they stopped for another traffic signal at a lighted intersection, he looked carefully and said, "Oh man," with all the emphasis inside him somewhere, and his eyes contracted into two pitying little knots of wrinkles. Horty knew the fat boy was sorry for him, and only then did he begin to cry openly. He wished he could stop, but he couldn't, and didn't while the boy bound up his

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hand again and for quite a while afterward.

The fat boy sat back on a new roll of canvas to wait for Horty to calm down. Once Horty subsided a little and the boy winked at him, and Horty, profoundly susceptible to the least kindness, began to wail again. The boy picked up the paper bag, looked into it, grunted, closed it carefully and put it out of the way on the canvas. Then to Horty's astonishment, he removed from his inside coat pocket a large silver cigar case, the kind with five metal cylinders built together, took out a half a cigar, put it all in his mouth and turned it to wet it down, and lit up, surrounding himself with sweet-acrid blue smoke. He did not try to talk, and after a while Horty must have dozed off, because he opened his eyes to find the fat boy's jacket folded as a pillow under his head, and he could not remember its being put there. It was dark then; he sat up, and immediately the fat boy's voice came from the blackness— "Take it easy, kid."

A small pudgy hand steadied Horty's back. "How do you feel?"

Horty tried to talk, choked, swallowed and tried again. "All right, I guess. Hungry... gee! We're out in the country!"

He became conscious of the fat boy squatting beside him. The hand left his back; in a moment the flame of a match startled him, and for an etched moment the boy's face floated before him in the wavering light, moonlike, with delicate pink lips acrawl on the black cigar. Then with a practiced flick of his fingers, he sent the match and its brilliance flying out into the night. "Smoke?"

"I never did smoke," said Horty. "Some corn-silk, once." He looked admiringly at the red jewel at the end of the cigar. "You smoke a lot, huh."

"Stunts m'growth," said the other, and burst into a peal of shrill laughter. "How's the hand?"

"It hurts some. Not so bad."

"You got a lot of grit, kid. I'd be screamin' for morphine if I was you. What happened to it?"

HORTY TOLD him. The story came out in snatches, out of sequence, but the fat boy got it all. He questioned briefly, and to the point, and did not comment at all. The conversation died after he had asked as many questions as he apparently wanted to, and for a while Horty thought the other had dozed off. The cigar dimmed and dimmed, occasionally sputtering around the edges, once in a while brightening in a wavery fashion as vagrant air touched it from the back of the truck.

Abruptly, and in a perfectly wide-awake voice, the fat boy asked him, "You lookin' fer work?"

"Work? Well—I guess maybe."

"What made you eat them ants?" came next.

"Well, I—I don't know. I guess I just—well, I wanted to."

"Do you do that a lot?"

"Not too much." This was a different kind of questioning than he had had from Armand. The boy asked him about it without revulsion, without any more curiosity, really, than he had asked him how old he was, what grade he was in.

"Can you sing?"

"Well—I guess so. Some."

"Sing something. Sing—uh—*Stardust*. Know it?"

Horty looked out at the starlit highway racing away beneath the rumbling wheels, the blaze of yellow-white which turned to dwindling red tail-light eyes as a car

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whisked by on the other side of the road. The fog was gone, and a lot of the pain was gone from his hand, and most of all he was gone from Armand and Tonta. Kay and given him a feather-touch of kindness, and this odd boy, who talked in a way he had never heard a boy talk before, had given him another sort of kindness. There were the beginnings of a wonderful warm glow inside him, a feeling he had had only once or twice before in his whole life—the time he had won the sack-race and they gave him a khaki handkerchief, and the time four kids had whistled to a mongrel dog, and the dog had come straight to him, ignoring the others. He began to sing, and because the truck rumbled so, he had to sing out to be heard; and because he had to sing out, he leaned on the song, giving something of himself to it as a high-steel worker gives part of his weight to the wind.

He finished. The fat boy said "Hey." The unaccented syllable was warm praise. Without any further comment he went to the front of the truck body and thumped on the square pane of glass there. The truck immediately slowed, pulled over and stopped by the roadside. The fat boy went to the tailgate, sat down, and slid off to the road.

"You stay right there," he told Horty. "I'm gonna ride up front a while. You hear me now—don't go 'way."

"I won't," said Horty.

"How the hell can you sing like that with your hand mashed?"

"I don't know. It doesn't hurt so much now."

"Do you eat grasshoppers too? Worms?"

"No!" cried Horty, horrified.

"Okay," said the boy. He went to the cab of the truck; the door slammed, and the truck ground off again.

Horty worked his way carefully forward until, squatting by the front wall of the truck-body, he could see through the square pane.

The driver was a tall man with a curious skin, lumpy and grey-green. He had a nose like Junky's, but almost no chin, so that he looked like an aged parrot. He was so tall that he had to curve over the wheel like a fern-frond.

Next to him were two little girls. One had a round bush of white hair (he found out later that it was platinum and the other had two thick ropes of pigtails, bangs, and beautiful teeth.) The fat boy was next to her, talking animatedly. The driver seemed not to pay any attention to the conversation at all.

Horty's head was not clear, but he did not feel sick either. Everything had an exciting, dreamlike quality. He moved back in the truck body and lay down with his head on the fat boy's jacket. Immediately he sat up, and crawled among the goods stacked in the truck until his hand found the long roll of canvas, moved along it until he found his paper bag. Then he lay down again, his left hand resting easily on his stomach, his right inside the bag, with his index and little fingers resting between Junky's nose and chin. He went to sleep.

CHAPTER III

WHEN HE woke again the truck had stopped, and he opened unfocussed eyes to a writhing glare of light—red and orange, green and blue, with an underlying sheet of dazzling gold.

He raised his head, blinking, and resolved the lights into a massive

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post bearing neon signs: ICE CREAM TWENTY FLAVORS, and CABINS and BAR—EAT. The wash of gold came from floodlights over the service area of a gas station. Three tractor-trailer trucks were drawn up behind the fat boy's truck; one of them had its trailer built of heavily-ribbed stainless steel and was very lovely under the lights.

"You awake, kid?"

"Uh—Hi! Yes."

"We're going to grab a bite. Come on."

Horty rose stiffly to his knees. He said, "I haven't got any money."

"Hell with that," said the fat boy. "Come on."

He put a firm hand under Horty's armpit as he climbed down. A juke-box throbbed behind the grinding sound of a gasoline pump, and their feet crunched pleasantly on cinders. "What's your name?" Horty asked.

"They call me Havana," said the fat boy. "I never been there. It's the cigars."

"My name's Horty Bluett."

"We'll change that."

The driver and the two girls were waiting for them by the door of a diner. Horty hardly had a chance to look at them before they all crowded through and lined up at the counter. Horty sat between the driver and the silver-haired girl. The other one, the one with dark ropes of braided hair took the next stool, and Havana, the fat-boy, sat at the end.

Horty looked first at the driver—looked, stared, and dragged his eyes away in the same tense moment. The driver's sagging skin was indeed a grey-green, dry, loose, leather-rough. He had pondulous pouches under his eyes, which were red and inflamed-looking, and his underlip drooped to show long white lower incisors. The backs of his hands showed the same loose sage-green skin, though his fingers were normal. They were long and the nails were exquisitely manicured.

"That's Solum," said Havana, leaning forward over the counter and talking across the two girls. "He's the Alligator-Skinned Man, an' the ugliest human in captivity." He must have sensed Horty's thought that Solum might resent this designation, for he added, "He's deef. He don't know what goes on."

"I'm Bunny," said the girl next to him. She was plump—not fat like Havana, but round—butter-ball round, skin-tight round. Her flesh was flesh colored and blood-colored—all pink with no yellow about it. Her hair was as white as cotton, but glossy, and her eyes were the extraordinary ruby of a white rabbit's. She had a little midge of a voice and an all but ultrasonic giggle, which she used now. She stood barely as high as his shoulder, though they sat at the same height. She was out of proportion only in this one fact of the long torso and the short legs. "An' this is Zena."

HORTY TURNED his gaze full on her and gulped. She was the most beautiful little work of art he had ever seen in his life. Her dark hair shone, and her eyes shone too, and her head planed from temple to cheek, curved from cheek to chin, softly and smoothly. Her skin was tanned over a deep, fresh glow like the pink shadows between the petals of a rose. The lipstick she chose was dark, nearly a brown red; that and the dark skin made the whites of her eyes like beacons. She wore a dress with a wide collar that lay back on her shoulders, and a neckline that dropped almost to her waist. That neckline told Horty for the

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very first time that these kids, Havana and Bunny and Zena, weren't kids at all. Bunny was girl-curved, puppy-fat curve, the way even a four-year-old girl—or boy—might be. But Zena had breasts, real, taut, firm, separate breasts. He looked at them and then at the three small faces, as if the faces he had seen before had disappeared and were replaced by new ones. Havana's studied, self-assured speech and his cigars were his badges of maturity, and albino Bunny would certainly show some such emblem in a minute.

"I won't tell you his name," said Havana. "He's fixin' to get a new one, as of now. Right, kid?"

"Well," said Horty, still struggling with the strange shifting of estimated place these people had made within him, "Well, I guess so."

"He's cute," said Bunny. "You know that, kid?" She uttered her almost inaudible giggle. "You're cute."

Horty found himself looking at Zena's breasts again and his cheeks flamed. "Don't rib him," said Zena.

It was the first time she had spoken. ... One of the earliest things Horty could remember was a cat-tail stalk he had seen lying on the bank of a tidal creek. He was only a toddler then, and the dark-brown sausage of the cat-tail fastened to its dry yellow stem had seemed a hard and brittle thing. He had, without picking it up, run his fingers delicately down its length, and the fact that it was not dried wood, but velvet, was a thrilling shock. He had such a shock now, hearing Zena's voice for the first time.

The short-order man, a pasty-faced youth with a tired mouth and laugh-wrinkles around his eyes and nostrils, lounged up to them. He apparently felt no surprise at seeing the midgets or the hideous green-skinned Solum. "Hi, Havana. You folks setting up around here?"

"Not fer six weeks or so. We're down Eltonville way. We'll milk the State Fair and work back. Comin' in with a load o' props. Cheeseburger fer the glamorpus there. What's yer pleasure, ladies?"

"Scrambled on rye toast," said Bunny.

Zena said, "Fry some bacon until it's almost burned—"

"—an' crumble it over some peanut-butter on whole wheat. I remember, princess," grinned the cook. "What say, Havana?"

"Steak. You too, huh?" he asked Horty. "Nup—he can't cut it. Ground sirloin, an' I'll shoot you if you bread it. Peas an' mashed."

The cook made a circle of his thumb and forefinger and went to get the order.

Horty asked, timidly, "Are you with a circus?"

"Carny," said Havana.

Zena smiled at his expression. It made his head swim. "That's a carnival. You know. Does your hand hurt?"

"Not much."

"That kills me," Havana exploded. "Y'oughta see it." He drew his right hand across his left fingers and made a motion like crumbling crackers. "Man."

"We'll get that fixed up. What are we going to call you?" asked Bunny.

"Let's figure out what he's going to do first," said Havana. "We got to make the Maneater happy."

"About those ants," said Bunny, "would you eat slugs and grasshoppers, and that?" She asked him straight out, and this time she did not giggle.

"No!" said Horty, simultaneously with Havana's "I already asked him that. That's out, Bunny. The Man-

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eater don't like to use a geek anyway."

Regretfully, Bunny said, "No carny ever had a midge that would geek. It would be a card."

"What's a geek?" asked Horty.

"He wants to know what's a geek."

"Nothing very nice," said Zena. "It's a man who eats all sorts of nasty things, and bites the heads off live chickens and rabbits."

HORTY SAID, "I don't think I'd like doing that," so soberly that the three midgets burst into a shrill explosion of laughter. Horty looked at them all, one by one, and sensed that they laughed with, not at him, and so he laughed too. Again he felt that inward surge of warmth. These folk made everything so easy. They seemed to understand that he could be a little different from other folks, and it was all right. Havana had apparently told them all about him, and they were eager to help.

"I told you," said Havana, "he sings like an angel. Never heard anything like it. Wait'll you hear."

"You play anything?" asked Bunny. "Zena, could you teach him guitar?"

"Not with that hand," said Havana.

"*Stop* it!" Zena cried. "Just when did you people decide he was going to work with us?"

Havana opened his mouth helplessly. Bunny said, "Oh—I thought..." and Horty stared at Zena. Were they trying to give and take away all at the same time?

"Oh, kiddo, don't look at me like that," said Zena. "You'll tear me apart.." Again, in spite of his distress, he could all but feel her voice with fingertips. She said, "I'd do anything in the world for you, child. But— it would have to be something good. I don't know that this would be good."

"Sure it'd be good," scoffed Havana. "Where's he gonna eat? Who's gonna take him in? Listen, after what he's been through he deserves a break. What's the matter with it, Zee? The Maneater?"

"I can handle the Maneater," she said casually. Somehow, Horty sensed that in that casual remark was the thing about Zena that made the others await her decision. "Look, Havana," she said, "what happens to a kid his age makes him what he will be when he grows up. Carny's all right for us. It's home to us. It's the one place where we can be what we are and like it. What would it be for him, growing up in it? That's no life for a kid."

"You talk as if there was nothing in a carnival but midges and freaks."

"In a way that's so," she murmured. "I'm sorry," she added. "I shouldn't have said that. I can't think straight tonight. There's something..." She shook herself. "I don't know. But I don't think it's a good idea."

Bunny and Havana looked at each other. Havana shrugged helplessly. And Horty couldn't help himself. His eyes felt hot, and he said "Gee."

"Oh, Kid, don't."

"Hey!" barked Havana. "Grab him! He's fainting!"

Horty's face was suddenly pale and twisted with pain. Zena slid off her stool and put her arm around him. "Sick, honey? Your hand?"

Gasping, Horty shook his head. "Junky," he whispered, and grunted as if his windpipe were being squeezed. He pointed with his bandaged hand toward the door. "Truck," he rasped. "In—Junky—oh, truck!"

The midgets looked at one another, and then Havana leaped from his stool and, running to Solum, punched

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his arm. He made quick motions, pointing outside, turning an imaginary steering wheel, beckoning toward the door.

MOVING with astonishing speed, the big man wheeled to the door and was gone, the others following. Solum was at the truck almost before the midgets and Horty were outside. He bounded catlike past the cab, throwing a quick glance into it, and in two more jumps was at the tail gate and inside. There were a couple of thumps and Solum emerged, the tattered figure of a highway bum dangling from his parti-colored hands. The tramp was struggling wildly, but when the brilliant golden light fell on Solum's face, he uttered a scratchy ululation which must have been clearly audible a quarter of a mile away. Solum dropped him on to the cinders; he landed heavily on his back and lay there writhing and terrified, fighting to get wind back into his shocked lungs.

Havana threw away his cigar stub and pounced on the prone figure, roughly going through the pockets. He said something unprintable and then, "Look here—our new soup-spoons and four compacts and a lipstick and—why, you little sneak," he snarled at the man, who was not large but was nearly three times his size. The man twitched as if he would throw Havana off him; Solum immediately leaned down and raked a large hand across his face. The man screamed again, and this time did surge up and send Havana flying; not, however, to attack, but to run sobbing and slobbering with fear from the gaunt Solum. He disappeared into the darkness across the highway with Solum at his heels.

Horty went to the tailgate. He said, timidly, to Havana, "Would you look for my package?"

"That ol' paper bag? Sure." Havana swung up on the tailgate, reappeared a moment later with the bag, and handed it to Horty.

"Gee," said Horty. "Junky. He's all busted." He drew out the two pieces of the hideous face. The nose was crushed to a coarse powder of papier-mache, and the face was cracked in two, a large piece and a small piece. There was an eye in each, glittering. "Gee," Horty said again, trying to fit them together with one hand.

Havana, busy gathering up the loot, said over his shoulder, "'Sa damn shame, kid. The guy must've put his knee on it while he was goin' through our stuff." He tossed the odd collection of purchases into the cab of the truck while Horty wrapped Junky up again. "Let's go back inside. Our order'll be up."

"What about Solum?" asked Horty. "He'll be along."

Horty was conscious, abruptly, that Zena's deep eyes were fixed on him. He almost spoke to her, didn't know what to say, flushed in embarrassment, and led the way into the restaurant. Zena sat beside him this time. She leaned across him for the salt, and whispered, "How did you know someone was in the truck?"

Horty settled his paper bag in his lap, and saw her eyes on it as he did so. "Oh," she said; and then in quite a different tone, slowly, "Oh-h." He knew he need not answer.

Solum followed them in almost immediately. He dusted his hands off in an exaggerated gesture, and grinned—quite the most horrible sight Horty had ever seen. Then his face relaxed completely; it slumped; and he began to eat, putting small mouthfuls rapidly into his huge jaws.

"How did you know there was

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The toy had been smashed, Horty saw, the face torn, much like his own fingers . . .

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someone out there?" demanded Havana, busy with a catsup bottle.

Horty began to speak, but Zena interrupted. "I've changed my mind," she said suddenly. "I think carny can do the kid more good than harm. It's better than making his way on the outside."

"Well now." Havana put down the bottle and beamed. Bunny clapped her hands. "*Good*, Zee! I knew you'd see it."

"I saw—that," said Zena, pointing.

"Coffee urn?" said Havana stupidly. "Toaster?"

"The mirror, silly. Will you look?" She leaned close to Horty and put her arm around his head, drawing their two faces together. The reflection looked back at them—small faces, both brown, both deep-eyed, oval, dark-haired. If Horty were wearing lipstick and braids, his face would have been different from hers—but very little.

"Your long-lost brother!" breathed Bunny.

"My sister," said Zena flatly. "Look—there are two bunks in my end of the wagon. . .stop that cackling, Bunny; I'm old enough to be his mother and besides—oh, shut up. No; this is the perfect way to do it. The Maneater never has to know who he is. It's up to you two."

"We won't say anything," said Havana.

Solum kept on eating.

Horty asked, "Who's the Maneater?"

"The boss," said Bunny. "He used to be a doctor. He'll fix up your hand."

Zena's eyes looked at something that was not in the room. "He hates people," she said. "All people."

Horty was startled. This was the first indication among these odd folk that there might be something to be afraid of. Zena, understanding, touched his arm. "Don't be afraid. His way of hating people won't hurt you."

CHAPTER IV

THEY REACHED the carnival in the dark part of the morning, when the distant hills had just begun to separate themselves from the paling sky.

To Horty it was all thrilling and mysterious. Not only had he met these people, but there was also the excitement and mystery ahead, and the way of starting it, the game he must play, the lines he must never forget. And now, at dawn, the carnival itself. The wide dim street, paved with wood shavings, seemed faintly luminous between the rows of stands and bally-platforms. Here a dark neon tube made ghosts of random light rays from the growing dawn; there one of the rides stretched hungry arms upward in bony silhouette. There were sounds, sleepy, restless, alien sounds; and the place smelled of damp earth, popcorn, perspiration, and sweet exotic manures.

The truck threaded its way behind the western row of midway stands and came to a stop by a long house-trailer with doors at each end.

"Home," yawned Bunny. Horty was riding in front with the girls now, and Havana had curled up in the back. "Out you get. Scoot, now; right into that doorway. The Maneater'll be asleep, and no one will see you. When you come out you'll be somebody different, and then we'll go fix your hand up."

Horty stood on the truck step, glanced around, and then arrowed to the door of the trailer and skinned inside. It was dark there. He stood

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clear of the door and waited for Zena to come in, close it, and draw the curtains on the small windows before turning on the lights.

The light seemed very bright when it blinked on. Horty found himself in a small square room. There was a tiny bunk on each side, a compact kitchenette in one corner, and what appeared to be a closet in the other.

"All right," said Zena, "take off your clothes."

"*All* of 'em?"

"Of course, all of them." She saw his startled face, and laughed. "Listen, Kiddo. I'll tell you something about us little people. Uh—how old did you say you were?"

"I'm almost nine."

"Well, I'll try. Ordinary grown up people are very careful about seeing each other without clothes. Whether or not it makes any sense, they are that way because there's a big difference between men and women when they're grown up. More than between boys and girls. Well, a midget stays like a child, in most ways, all his life except for maybe a couple of years. So a lot of us don't let such things bother us. As for us, you and I, we might as well make up our minds right now that it's not going to make any difference. In the first place, no one but Bunny and Havana and me know you're a boy. In the second place, this little room is just too small for two people to live in if they're going to be stooping and cringing and hiding from each other because of something that doesn't matter. See?"

"I—I guess so."

She helped him out of his clothes, and he began his careful education on how to be a woman from the skin outward.

"Tell me something, Horty," she said, as she turned out a neat drawer, looking for clothes for him. "What's in the paper bag?"

"That's Junky. It's a jack-in-the-box. It was, I mean. Armand busted it— I told you. Then the man in the truck busted it more."

"Could I see?"

Worrying into a pair of her socks, he nodded toward one of the bunks. "Go ahead."

SHE LIFTED out the tattered bits of papier-mache. "*Two* of them!" she exploded. She turned and looked at Horty as if he had turned bright purple, or sprouted rabbit's ears. "Two!" she said again. "Are these really yours? Both of them?"

"They're Junky's eyes," he explained.

"Where did Junky come from?"

"I had him before I was adopted. A policeman found me when I was a baby. I was put in a Home. I got Junky there. I guess I never had any folks."

"And Junky stayed with you—here, let me help you into that—Junky stayed with you from then on?"

"Yes. He had to."

"Why had to?"

"How do you hook this?"

Zena checked what seemed to be an impulse to push him into a corner and hold him still until she extracted the information from him. "About Junky," she said patiently.

"Oh. Well, I just had to have him near me. No, not near me. I could go a long way away as long as Junky was all right. As long as he was mine, I mean. I mean, if I didn't even see him for a year it was all right, but if somebody moved him, I knew it, and if somebody hurt him, I hurt too. See?"

"Indeed I do," said Zena surprisingly. Again Horty felt that sweet shock of delight; these people

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seemed to understand everything so well.

Horty said, "I used to think everybody had something like that. Something they'd be sick if they lost it, like. I never thought to ask anyone about it, even. And then Armand, he picked on me about Junky. He used to hide Junky to get me excited. Once he put him on a garbage truck. I got so sick I had to have a doctor. I kept yelling for Junky, until the doctor told Armand to get this Junky back to me or I would die. Said it was a fix something. Ation."

"A fixation. I know the routine," Zena smiled.

"Armand, he was mad, but he had to do it. So anyway he got tired of fooling with Junky, and put him in the top of the closet and forgot about him pretty much."

"You look like a regular dream-girl," said Zena admiringly. She put her hands on his shoulders and looked gravely into his eyes. "Listen to me. Horty. This is *very* important. It's about the Maneater. You're going to see him in a few minutes, and—"

"I remember everything you told me, about I'm your half-sister and a man put my hand in a vise and all that."

"Good. Gosh, honey, I'm sorry to give you so many things to think of at once! No; this is something just between us. First of all, you must never, *never* let the Maneater know about Junky. We'll find a place for him here, and I don't want you to ever talk about him again, except to me. Promise?"

Wide eyed, Horty nodded. "Uh huh."

"Good. And one more thing, just as important. The Maneater's going to fix your hand. Don't worry; he's a good doctor. But I want you to push every bit of old bandage, every little scrap of cotton he uses, over toward me if you can, without letting him notice it. I don't want you to leave a drop of your blood in his trailer, understand? Not a drop. I'm going to offer to clean up for him—he'll be glad; he hates to do it—and you help me as much as you can. All right?"

Horty promised. Bunny and Havana pounded just then. Horty went out first, holding his bad hand behind him, and they called him Zena, and Zena pirouetted out, laughing, while they goggled at Horty. Havana dropped his cigar and said "Hey."

"Zee, he's *beautiful!*" cried Bunny.

Zena held up a tiny forefinger. "*She's* beautiful, and don't you forget it."

"I feel awful funny," said Horty, twitching his skirt.

"Where on earth did you get that dress?"

"Bought it and never wore it, said Zena. "It won't fit my chest expansion...Come on, kids. Let's go wake the Maneater."

They made their way among the wagons. "Take smaller steps," said Zena. "That's better. You remember everything?"

"I—guess so. You mean all you told me about living in Millboro and all."

"That's right. And if he should ask a question and you don't know, just smile. I'll be right beside you."

A LONG SILVER trailer was parked next to a tent bearing a brilliantly colored poster of a man in a top-hat. He had long pointed mustachios and zig-zags of lightning came from his eyes. Below it, in flaming letters, was the legend

WHAT DO YOU THINK?
Mephisto Knows.

"His name isn't Mephisto," said

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Bunny. "It's Monetre. He used to be a doctor before he was a carny. Everyone calls him Maneater. He don't mind."

Havana pounded on the door. "Hey, Maneater! Y'going to sleep all afternoon?"

"You're fired," growled the silver trailer.

"Okay," said Havana casually. "Come on out and see what we got."

"Not if you want to put it on the payroll," said the sleepy voice. There were movements inside. Bunny pushed Horty over near the door and waved to Zena to hide. Zena flattened against the trailer wall.

The door opened. The man who stood there was tall, cadaverous, with hollows in his cheeks and a long bluish jaw. His eyes seemed, in the early morning light, to be just inch-deep black sockets in his head. "What is it?"

Bunny pointed at Horty. "Maneater, who's that?"

"Who's that?" He peered. "Zena, of course. Good morning, Zena," he said, his tone suddenly courtly.

"Good morning," laughed Zena, dancing out from behind the door.

The Maneater stared from Zena to Horty and back. "Oh, my aching bankroll," he said. "A sister act. And if I don't hire her you'll quit. And Bunny and Havana will quit."

"A mind-reader," said Havana, nudging Horty.

"What's your name, kid sister?"

"My pa named me Hortense," recited Horty correctly. "but everyone calls me Kiddo."

"I don't blame them," said the Maneater in a kindly voice. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do, Kiddo. I'm going to call your bluff. Get off the lot, and if the rest of you don't like it, you can go along with her. If I don't see any of you on the midway at eleven o'clock this morning, I'll know what you decided." He closed the door softly and with great firmness.

"Oh—*gee!*" said Horty.

"It's all right," grinned Havana. "He don't mean it. He fires everybody 'most every day. When he means it he pays 'em. Go get 'im, Zee."

Zena rippled her knuckles on the aluminum door. "Mister Maneater!" she sang.

"I'm counting your pay," said the voice from inside.

"Oh-oh," said Havana.

"Please. Just a minute," cried Zena.

The door opened up again. The Maneater had one hand full of money. "Well?"

Horty heard Bunny mutter, "Do good, Zee. Do good!"

Zena beckoned to Horty. He stepped forward hesitantly. "Kiddo, show him your hand."

Horty extended his ruined hand. Zena peeled off the soiled, bloody handkerchiefs one by one. The inner one was stuck fast; Horty whimpered as she disturbed it. Enough could be seen, however, to show the Maneater's trained eye that three fingers were gone completely and the rest of the hand in a bad way.

"How in creation did you do a thing like this, girl?" he barked. Horty fell back, frightened.

"Kiddo, go over there with Havana, hm?"

HORTY RETREATED, gratefully. Zena began talking rapidly in a low voice. He could only hear part of it. "Terrible shock, Maneater. Don't remind her of it, ever...carpenter...and took her to his shop... when she...and her hand in the vise."

"No wonder I hate people," the Maneater snarled. He asked her a question.

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"No," said Zena. "She got away, but her hand..."

"Come here, Kiddo," said the Maneater. His face was something to see. His whip of a voice seemed to issue from his nostrils which, suddenly, were not carven slits but distended, circular holes. Horty turned pale.

Havana pushed him gently. "Go on, Kiddo. He's not mad. He's sorry for you. Go *on!*"

Horty inched forward and timidly climbed the step. "Come in here."

"We'll see you," called Havana. He and Bunny turned away. As the door closed behind him and Zena, Horty looked back and saw Bunny and Havana gravely shaking hands.

"Sit down there," said the Maneater.

The inside of his trailer was surprisingly spacious. There was a bed across the front end, partially curtained. There was a neat galley, a shower, and a safe; a large table, cabinets, and more books than one would ever expect to fit into such space.

"Does it hurt?" murmured Zena.

"Not much."

"Don't you worry about that," growled the Maneater. He put alcohol, cotton, and a hypodermic case on the table. "Tell you what I'm going to do. (Just to be different from other doctors.) I'm going to block the nerve on your whole arm. When I poke the needle into you it'll hurt, like a bee-sting. Then your arm will feel very funny, as if it were a balloon being blown up. Then I'll clean up that hand. It won't hurt."

Horty smiled up at him. There was something in this man, with his frightening changes of voice and his treacherous humor, his kindness and his cruel aura, which the boy found deeply appealing. There was a kindness like Kay's, little Kay who hadn't cared if he ate ants. And there was a cruelty like Armand Bluett's. If nothing else, the Maneater would serve as a link with the past for Horty—for a while at least. "Go ahead," said Horty.

"That's a good girl."

The Maneater bent to his work, with Zena, fascinated, looking on, deftly moving things out of his way, making things more convenient for him. So absorbed he became that if he had any further questions to ask about "Kiddo" he forgot them.

Zena cleaned up afterward.

CHAPTER V

PIERRE MONETRE had graduated from college three days before he was sixteen, and from medical school when he was twenty-one. A man died under his hands during a simple appendectomy, which was not Pierre Monetre's fault. He then began to drink. He took his drunkenness before the world as he had taken his brilliance and his skill—front and center, and damn the comments. The comments on his brilliance and his skill had helped him. The comments on his drunkenness shut him out.

He got over the drunkenness; alcoholism is not a disease, but a symptom. There are two ways of disposing of alcoholism. One is to cure the disorder which causes it. The other is to substitute some other symptom for it. That was Pierre Monetre's way.

He chose to despise the men who had shut him out, and let himself despise the rest of humanity because it was kin to those men.

He enjoyed his disgust. He built himself a pinnacle of hatred and stood on it to sneer at the world. This gave him all the altitude he needed at the time. He starved while he did it; but since riches were of value to the

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world at which he sneered, he enjoyed his poverty too. For a while.

But a man with such an attitude is like a child with a whip—or a nation with battleships. For a while it is sufficient to stand in the sun, with one's power in plain sight for all to see. Soon, however, the whip must whistle and crack, the rifles must thunder, the man must take more than a stand; he must take action.

Pierre Monetre worked for a while with subversive groups. It was of no importance to him which group, or what it stood for, as long as its aim was to tear down the current structure of the majority. He did not confine this to politics, but also did what he could to introduce modern non-objective art into traditional galleries, agitated for atonal music in string quartets, poured beef-extract on the serving tables of a vegetarian restaurant, and made a score of other stupid, petty rebellions.

His disgust meanwhile, fed on itself, until it was neither stupid nor petty. Again he found himself at a loss for a means of expressing it. He grew increasingly bitter as his clothes wore out, as he was forced out of one sordid garret after another. He never blamed himself, but felt victimized by humanity—a humanity that was, part and parcel, inferior to him. And suddenly he was given what he wanted.

He had to eat. All his corrosive hatreds focussed there. There was no escaping it, and for a while there was no means of eating except doing work which would be of some value to some part of humanity. This galled him, but there was no other way of inducing humanity to pay him him for his work. So he turned to a phase of his medical training and got a job in a biological laboratory doing cellular analyses. His hatred of mankind could not change the characteristics of his interested, inquiring brilliant mind; he loved the work, hating only the fact that it benefited people—employers, their clients, (who were mostly doctors and their patients.)

He lived in a house—an ex-stable—near the edge of a small town, where he could take long walks by himself in the woods and think his strange thoughts. Only a man who had consciously turned away, for years, from everything human would have noticed what he had noticed one fall afternoon, or would have had the curiosity to examine it. Only a man with his unusual combination of training and ability would have had the equipment to explain it. And certainly, only such a social monster could have used it as he did.

He saw two trees.

EACH WAS a tree like any other tree—an oak sapling, twisted from some early accident, young and alive. Never in a thousand years would he have noticed either of them, particularly, had he seen it alone. But he saw them together; his eye swept over them, he raised his eyebrows in slight surprise and walked on. Then he stopped and went back and stood staring at them. And suddenly he grunted as if he had been kicked, and went between the trees—they were twenty feet apart—and gaped from one to the other.

The trees were the same size. Each had a knotted primary limb snaking off to the north. Each had a curling scar on the first shoot from it. The first cluster on the primary on each tree had five leaves on it.

Monetre went and stood closer, running his gaze from tree to tree, up and down, one, then the other.

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What he saw was impossible. The law of averages permits of such a thing as two absolutely indentical trees, but at astronomical odds. Impossible was the working word for such a statistic.

Monetre reached and pulled down a leaf from one tree, and from the other took down its opposite number.

They were identical—v e i n i n g, shape, size, texture.

That was enough for Monetre. He grunted again, looked searchingly around to fix the location in his mind, and headed back to his shack at a dead run.

Far into the night he labored over the oak leaves. He stared through a magnifying glass until his eyes ached. He made solutions of what he had in the house—vinegar, sugar, salt, a little phenol—and marinated parts of the leaves. He dyed corresponding parts of them with diluted ink.

What he found out about them checked and double-checked when he took them to the laboratory in the morning. Qualitative and quantitative analysis, volumetric and kindling temperature and specific gravity tests, spectrographics and pH ratings they all said the same thing; these two leaves were incredibly and absolutely identical.

Feverishly, in the months that followed, Monetre worked on parts of the trees. His working microscopes told the same story; he talked his employer into letting him use the 300-power mike which the lab kept in a bell-jar, and it said the same thing. The trees were identical, not leaf for leaf, but cell for cell. Bark and cambium and heartwood, they were the same.

It was his own incessant sampling which gave him his next lead. He took his specimens from the trees after the most meticulous measurements. A core-drill "take" from Tree A was duplicated on Tree B, to the fractional millimeter. And one day Monetre positioned his drill on both trees, got his sample from Tree A, and broke his drill.

He blamed it, of course, on the drill, and therefore on the men who made it, and therefore on all men; and he fumed home, happily in his own ground.

But when he came back the next day he found a hole in Tree B, exactly on the corresponding spot to his tap on Tree A.

He stood with his fingers on the inexplicable hole, and for a long moment his active mind was at a complete stop. Then, carefully, he took out his knife and cut a cross in Tree A, and, in the same place on Tree B, a triangle. He cut them deep and clear, and went home again to read more esoteric books on cell structure.

When he returned to the forest, he found both trees bearing a cross.

He made many more tests. He cut odd shapes in each tree. He painted swatches of color on them. He found that overlays, like paint and nailed-on pieces of board, remained as he applied them. But anything affecting the structure of the tree—a cut or scrape or laceration or puncture—was repeated, from Tree A to Tree B.

Tree A was the original. Tree B was some sort of a. . .copy.

PIERRE MONETRE worked on Tree B for two years before he found out, with the aid of an electron microscope, that aside from the function of exact duplication, Tree B was different. In the nucleus of each cell of Tree B was a single giant molecule, akin to the hydro-carbon enz-

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ymes, which could transmute elements. Three cells removed from a piece of bark or leaf-tissue meant three cells replaced within an hour. The freak enzyme, depleted, would then rest for an hour or two, and slowly begin to restore itself, atom by captured atom, from the surrounding tissue.

The control of restoration in damaged tissue is a subtle business at its simplest. Any biologist can give a lucid description of what happens when cells begin to rebuild—what metabolistic factors are present, what oxygen exchange occurs, how fast and how large and for what purpose new cells are developed. But they cannot tell you *why*. They cannot say what gives the signal, "Start!" to a half-ruined cell, and what says "stop." They know that cancer is a malfunction of this control mechanism, but what the mechanism is they do not say. This is true of normal tissue.

But what of Pierre Monetre's Tree B? It never restored itself normally. It restored itself only to duplicate Tree A. Notch a twig of Tree A. Break off the corresponding twig of Tree B and take it home. For twelve to fourteen hours, that twig would work on the laborious process of reforming itself to be notched. After that it would stop, and be an ordinary piece of wood. Return then to Tree B, and you would find another restored twig, and this one with its notch perfectly duplicated.

Here even Pierre Monetre's skill bogged down. Cell regeneration is a mystery. Cell duplication is a step beyond an unfathomable enigma. But somewhere, somehow, this fantastic duplication was controlled, and Monetre doggedly set about finding what did it. He was a savage, hearing a radio and searching for the signal source. He was a dog, hearing his master cry out in pain because a girl wrote that she did not love him. He saw the result, and he tried, without adequate tools, without the capacity to understand it if it were thrust under his nose, to determine the cause.

A fire did it for him.

The few people who knew him by sight—none knew him any other way—were astonished that he joined the volunteer fire-fighters that autumn, when the smoke blasted through the hills driven by a flame-whipped wind. And for years there was a legend about the skinny feller who fought the fire like a soul promised release from hell. They told about cutting the new fire-trail, and how the skinny feller threatened to kill the forest ranger if he did not move his fire line a hundred yards north of where it had been planned. The skinny feller made history with his battle of the back-blaze, watering it with his very sweat to keep it out of a certain patch of wood. And when the fire advanced to the edge of the back-blaze, and the men broke and fled before it, the skinny feller was not with them, but stayed, crouched in the smoking moss between two oak saplings, with a spade and an axe in his bleeding hands and a fire in his eyes hotter than any that ever touched a tree. They saw all of that—

They did not see Tree B begin to tremble. Their eyes were not with Monetre's, to peer through heat and smoke and the agonized cloud of exhaustion which hovered around him, and see the scientist's mind reaching out unbidden to seize on the fact that the shuddering of Tree B was timed exactly with the rolling flames over a clearing a hundred and fifty feet away.

He watched it, red-eyed. Flame

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touched the rocky clearing, and the tree shivered. Flame tugged the earth like hair in a hurricane pulling a head, and when the fire wavered and streamed upward, Tree B stood firm. But when a tortured gust of cold air rushed in to fill the heat-born vacuum, and was pursued along the ground by fingers of fire, the tree shook and tensed, wavered and trembled.

Monetre dragged his half-flayed body to the clearing and watched the flames. A spear of red-orange there; the tree stood firm. A lick of a fiery tongue here, and the tree moved.

So he found it, in the middle of a basalt outcropping. He turned over a rock with fingers which sizzled when they touched it, and under it he found a jewel. He thrust it under his armpit and staggered, tottered, back to his trees, which were now in a small island built of earth and sweat and fire by his own demoniac energy, and he collapsed between the oak saplings while the fire roared past him.

JUST BEFORE dawn he staggered through a nightmare, a spitting, dying inferno, to his house, and hid the jewel. He dragged himself a quarter of a mile further toward the town before he collapsed. He regained consciousness in the hospital and immediately began demanding to be released. First they refused, next they tied him to his bed, and finally he left, at night, through the window, to be with his jewel.

Perhaps it was because he was at the ragged edge of insanity, or because the fusion between his conscious and unconscious minds was almost complete. More likely it was because he was peculiarly equipped, with that driving, searching mind of his. Certainly few, if any, men had ever done it before, but he did it. He established a contact with the jewel.

He did it with the bludgeon of his hatred. The jewel winked passively at him through all his tests—all that he dared give it. He had to be careful, once he found out that it was alive. His microscope told him that; it was not a crystal, but a supercooled liquid. It was a single cell, with a faceted wall. The solidified fluid inside was a colloid, with an index of refraction like that of polystyrene, and there was a complex nucleus which he did not understand.

His eagerness quarreled with his caution; he dared not run excessive heat, corrosion, and bombardment tests on it. Wildly frustrated, he sent to it a blast of the refined hatred which he had developed over the years, and the thing—screamed.

There was no sound. It was a pressure in his mind. There was no word, but the pressure was an agonized negation, a "no"-flavored impulse.

Pierre Monetre sat stunned at his battered table, staring out of the dark of his room at the jewel, which he had placed in the pool of light under a gooseneck lamp. He leaned forward and narrowed his eyes, and with complete honesty—for he had a ravening dislike of anything which bid to defy his understanding—he sent out the impulse again.

"No!"

The thing reacted, by that soundless cry, as if he had prodded it with a hot pin.

He thought, hard.

There was an unnatural tree, and it had been connected, in some way, with this buried jewel, a hundred and fifty feet away; for when flame came near the jewel, the tree trembled. When he flicked the jewel with the flame of his hatred, it reacted.

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He stood between the two saplings, holding the jewel, while the fire roared closer . . .

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Could the jewel have *built* that tree, with the other as a model? But how? *How?*

"Never mind how," he muttered. He'd find that out in good time. He could hurt the thing. Laws and punishment hurt; oppression hurts; power is the ability to inflict pain. This fantastic object would do what he wanted it to do or he would flog it to death.

He caught up a knife and ran outside. By the light of a waning moon he dug up a sprig of basil which grew near the old stable and planted it in a coffee can. In a similar can he put earth. Bringing them inside, he planted the jewel in the second can.

He composed himself at the table, gathering a particular strength. He had known that he had an extraordinary power over his own mind; in a way he was like a contortionist, who can make a shoulder muscle, or a thigh or part of an arm, jump and twitch individually. He did a thing like turning an electronic instrument, with his brain. He channeled his mental energy into the specific "wave-length" which hurt the jewel, and suddenly, shockingly, spewed it out.

Again and again he struck out at the jewel. Then he let it rest while he tried to bring into the cruel psychic blows some directive command. He visualized the drooping basil shrub, picturing it in the second can.

Grow one.

Copy that.

Make another.

Grow one.

Repeatedly he slashed and slugged the jewel with the order. He could all but hear it whimper. Once he detected, deep in his mind, a kaleidoscopic flicker of impressions—the oak tree, the fire, a black, star-studded emptiness, a triangle cut into bark. It was brief, and nothing like it was repeated for a long time, but Monetre was sure that the impressions had come from the jewel; that it was protesting something.

It gave in; he could feel it surrender. He bludgeoned it twice more for good measure, and went to bed.

In the morning he had two identical basil plants.

CHAPTER VI

CARNIVAL life plodded steadily along, season holding the tail of the season before. The years held three things for Horty. They were—belonging; Zena; and a light with a shadow.

After the Maneater fixed up his—"her"—hand, and the pink scar-tissue came in, the new midget was accepted. Perhaps it was the radiation of willingness, the delighted, earnest desire to fit in and to be of real value that did it, and perhaps it was a quirk or a carelessness on the Maneater's part, but Horty stayed.

In the carnival the pinheads and the roustabouts, the barkers and their shills, the dancers and fireaters and snake-men and ride mechanics, the layout and advance men, had something in common which transcended color and sex and racial and age differences. They were carny, all of them, interested in gathering their tips and turning them—which is carnivalese for collecting a crowd and persuading it to file past the ticket-taker—for this, and for this alone, they worked. And Horty was a part of it.

Horty's voice was a part of Zena's in their act, which followed Bets and Bertha, another sister team with a total poundage in the seven hundreds. Billed as The Little Sisters, Zena and Kiddo came on with a hil-

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arious burlesque of the preceding act, and then faded to one of their own, a clever song-and-dance routine which ended in a bewildering vocal —a harmonizing yodel. Kiddo's voice was clear and true, and blended like keys on an organ with Zena's full contralto. They also worked in the Kiddie's Village, a miniature town with its own fire station, city hall, and restaurants, all child-size; adults not admitted. Kiddo served weak tea and cookies to the round-eyed, freckle-faced moppets at the country fairs, and felt part of their wonder and part of their belief in this magic town. Part of...part of...it was a deep-down, thrilling theme to everything that Kiddo did; Kiddo was part of Horty, and Horty was part of the world, for the first time in his life.

Their forty trucks wound among the Rockies and filed out along the Pennsylvania Turnpike, snorted into the Ottawa Fairgrounds and blended themselves into the Fort Worth Exposition. Once, when he was ten, Horty helped the giant Bets bring her child into the world, and thought nothing of it, since it was so much a part of the expected-unexpected of being a carny. Once a pinhead, a happy, brainless dwarf who sat gurgling and chuckling with joy in a corner of the freak show, died in Horty's arms after drinking lye, and the scar in Horty's memory of that frightening scarlet mouth and the pained and puzzled eyes—that scar was a part of Kiddo, who was Horty, who was part of the world.

AND THE second thing was Zena, who was hands for him, eyes for him, a brain for him until he got into the swing of things, until he learned to be, with utter naturalness, a girl midget. It was Zena who made him belong, and his starved ego soaked it up. She read to him, dozens of books, dozens of kinds of books, in that deep, expressive voice which quite automatically took the parts of all the characters in a story. She led him, with her guitar and her phonograph records, into music. Nothing he learned changed him; but nothing he learned was forgotten. For Horty-Kiddo had eidetic memory.

Havana used to say it was a pity about that hand. Zena and Kiddo wore black gloves in their act, which seemed a little odd; and besides, it would have been nice if they both played guitar. But of course that was out of the question. Sometimes Havana used to remark to Bunny, at night, that Zena was going to wear her fingers plumb off if she played all day on the bally-platform and all night to amuse Horty; for the guitar would cry and ring for hours after they bedded down. Bunny would say sleepily that Zena knew what she was doing—which was, of course, perfectly true.

But the things Horty treasured most were the drowsy conversations in the dark, sometimes on a silent fairgrounds after hours, sometimes bumping along a moonwashed road.

"Horty—" (She was the only one who called him Horty. No one else heard her do it. It was like a private pet-name.)

"Mmm?"

"Can't you sleep?"

"Thinkin'..."

"Thinking about your childhood sweetheart"

"How'd you know? Uh—don't kid me, Zee."

"Oh, I'm sorry, honey."

Horty said into the darkness, "Kay was the only one who ever said anything nice to me, Zee. The only one. It wasn't only that night I ran away. Sometimes in school she'd just smile, that's all. I—I used to wait for it.

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You're laughing at me."

"No, Kiddo, I'm not. You're so sweet."

"Well," he said defensively, "I like to think about her sometimes."

He did think about Kay Hallowell, and often; for this was the third thing, the light with a shadow. The shadow was Armand Bluett. He could not think of Kay without thinking of Armand, though he tried not to. But sometimes the cold wet eyes of a tattered mongrel in some farmyard, or the precise, heralding sound of a key in a Yale lock, would bring Armand and Armand's flat sarcasm and Armand's hard and ready hands right into the room with him. Zena knew of this, which is why she always laughed at him when he mentioned Kay...

He learned so much in those somnolent talks. About the Maneater, for example. "How'd he ever get to be a carny, Zee?"

"I can't say exactly. Sometimes I think he hates carny. He seems to despise the people who come in, and I guess he's in the business mostly because its the only way he can keep his—" She fell silent.

"What, Zee?"

She was quiet until he spoke again. "He has some people he—thinks a lot of," she explained at length. "Solum. Gogol, the Fish Boy. Little Pennie was one of them." Little Pennie was the pinhead who had drunk lye. "A few others. And some of the animals. The two-legged cat, and the Cyclops. He—likes to be near them. He kept some of them, I think, before he got into show business. But it must have cost a lot. This way, he can make money out of them."

"Why does he like them, 'specially?"

She turned restlessly. "He's the same kind they are," she breathed. Then, "Horty, don't *ever* show him your hand!"

Horty was going to ask about that, but sensed that he should not, and went to sleep.

ONE NIGHT in Wisconsin something woke Horty.

Come here.

It wasn't a sound. It wasn't in words. It was a call. There was a cruel quality to it. Horty lay still.

Come here, come here. Come! Come!

Horty sat up. He heard the prairie wind, and the crickets.

Come! This time it was different. There was a coruscating blaze of anger in it. It was controlled and directive, and had in it a twinge of the pleasure of an Armand Bluett in catching a boy in an inarguable wrong. Horty swung out of bed and stood up, gasping.

"Horty? Horty—what is it?" Zena came sliding out of the dim whiteness of her sheets like the dream of a seal in surf.

"I'm supposed to—go," he said with difficulty.

"What is it?" she whispered tensely. "Like a voice inside you?"

He nodded. The furious command struck him again, and he twisted his face.

"Don't go," Zena whispered. "You hear me, Horty? Don't you move." She spun into a robe. "You get back into bed. Hold on tight; whatever you do, don't leave this trailer. The—it will stop. I promise you it will stop quickly." She pressed him back to his bunk. "Don't you go, now, no matter what happens."

Blinded, stunned by this urgent, painful pressure, he sank back on the bunk. The call flared again within him; he started up. "Zee—" But she was gone. He stood up, his head in his hands, and then remembered the furious urgency of her orders, and

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sat down again.

It came again and was—incomplete. Interrupted.

He sat quite still and felt for it with his mind, timidly, as if he were tonguing a sensitive tooth. It was gone. Exhausted, he fell back and went to sleep.

In the morning Zena was back. He had not heard her come in. When he asked her where she had been, she gave him a curious look and said, "Out." So he did not ask her anything more. But at breakfast with Bunny and Havana, she suddenly gripped his arm, taking advantage of a moment when the others had left the table to stove and toaster. "Horty! If you ever get a call like that again, wake me. Wake me right away, you hear?" She was so fierce he was frightened; he had only time to nod before the others came back. He never forgot it. And after that, there were not many times when he woke her and she slipped out, wordlessly, to come back hours later; for when he realized the calls were not for him, he no longer felt them.

The seasons passed and the carnival grew. The Maneater was still everywhere in it, flogging the roustabouts and the animal men, the daredevils and the drivers, with his weapon—his contempt, which he carried about openly like a naked sword.

The carnival grew—larger. Bunny and Havana grew—older, and so did Zena, in subtle ways. But Horty did not grow at all.

He—she—was a fixture now, with a clear soprano voice and black gloves. He passed with the Maneater, who withheld his contempt in saying "Good Morning"—a high favor—and who had little else to say. But Horty-Kiddo was loved by the rest, in the earnest, slap-dash way peculiar to carnies.

The show was a flat-car rig now, with press-agents and sky-sweeping searchlights, a dance pavilion and complicated, epicyclic rides. A national magazine had run a long picture story on the outfit, with emphasis on its "Strange People" ("Freak Show" being an unpopular phrase.) There was a press office now, and there were managers, and annual re-bookings from big organizations. There were public-address systems for the bally-platforms, and newer—not new, but newer—trailers for the personnel.

The Maneater had long since abandoned his mind-reading act, and, increasingly, was a presence only to those working on the lot. In the magazine stories, he was a "partner", if mentioned at all. He was seldom interviewed and never photographed. He spent his working hours with his staff, and stalking about the grounds, and his free time with his books and his rolling laboratory and his "Strange People". There were stories of his being found in the dark hours of the morning, standing in the breathing blackness with his hands behind him and his gaunt shoulders stooped, staring at Gogol in his tank, or peering over the two-headed snake or the hairless rabbit. Watchmen and animal men had learned to keep away from him at such times; they withdrew silently, shaking their heads, and left him alone.

"ZEE..."

"Mmm?"

"Had a talk with the Maneater today while they were setting up our tent."

"What'd he say?"

"Just small-talk. He said the rubes like our act. Guess that's as near as he can get to saying he likes it himself."

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"He doesn't," said Zena with certainty. "Anything else?"

"He asked to see my hand."

She sat bolt upright in her bunk. "He didn't!"

"I told him it didn't give me any trouble. Gosh—when was it that he fixed it? Seven years ago? Eight?"

"Did you show it to him?"

"Cool down, Zee! No, I didn't. I said I had to fix some costumes, and got away. But he called after me and said to come to his lab before ten tomorrow. I'm just trying to think of some way to duck it."

"I was afraid of this," she said, her voice shaking. She put her arms around her knees, resting her chin on them.

"It'll be all right, Zee," said Horty sleepily. "I'll think of something. Maybe he'll forget."

"He won't forget. He has a mind like an adding machine. He won't attach any importance to it until you don't show up; then, look out!"

"Well, s'pose I do show it to him."

"I've told you and told you, Horty, you must *never* do that!"

"All right, all right. —Why?"

"Don't you trust me?"

"You know I do."

She did not answer, but sat rigidly, in thought. Horty dozed off.

Later—probably two hours later—he was awakened by Zena's hand on his shoulder. She was crouched on the floor by his bunk. "Wake up, Horty. Wake up!"

"Wuh?"

"Listen to me, Horty. You remember all you've told me—*please* wake up!—remember, about Kay, and all?"

"Oh, sure."

"What was it you were going to do, some day?"

"You mean about going back there and seeing Kay again, and getting even with that old Armand?"

"That's right. Well, that's exactly what you're going to do."

"Well, sure." He yawned and closed his eyes. She shook him again. "I mean now, Horty. Tonight. Right now."

"Tonight? Right now?"

"Get up, Horty. Get dressed. I mean it."

He sat up blearily. "Zee...it's night time!"

"Get dressed," she said between her teeth. "Hop to it, Kiddo. You can't be a baby all your life."

HE SAT on the edge of the bed and shivered away the last smoky edges of sleep. "Zee!" he cried. "Go away? You mean, leave here? Leave the carnival and Havana and—and you?"

"That's right. Get dressed, Horty."

"But—where will I go?" He reached for his clothes. "What will I do? I don't know anybody out there!"

"You know where we are? It's only fifty miles to the town you came from. That's as near as we'll get this year. Anyway, you've been here too long," she added, her voice suddenly gentle. "You should have left before—a year ago, two years, maybe." She handed him a clean blouse.

"But why do I have to?" he asked pitiably.

"Call it a hunch, though it isn't, really. You wouldn't get through that appointment with the Maneater tomorrow. You've got to get out of here and stay out."

"I can't go!" he said, childishly protesting even as he obeyed her. "What are you going to tell the Maneater?"

"You had a telegram from your cousin, or some such thing. Leave it to me. You won't ever have to worry about it."

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"Not ever—can't I ever come back?"

"If you ever see the Maneater again, you turn and run. Hide. Do anything, but never let him near you as long as you live."

"What about you, Zee? I'll never see you again!" He zipped up the side of a grey pleated skirt and held still for Zee's deft application of eyebrow pencil.

"Yes you will," she said softly. "Some day. Some way. Write to me and tell me where you are."

"Write to you? Suppose the Maneater should get my letter? Would that be all right?"

"It would not." She sat down, casting a woman's absent, accurate appraisal over Horty. "Write to Havana. A penny postcard. Don't sign it. Pick it out on a typewriter. Advertise something—hats or haircuts, or some such. Put your return address on it but transpose each pair of numbers. Will you remember that?"

"I'll remember," said Horty vaguely.

"I know you will. You never forget anything. You know what you're going to learn now, Horty?"

"What?"

"You're going to learn to *use* what you know. You're just a child now. If you were anyone else, I'd say you were a case of arrested development. But all the books we've read and studied...you remember your anatomy, Horty? And the physiology?"

"Sure, and the science and history and all that. Zee, what am I going to do out there? I got nobody to tell me anything!"

"You'll have to tell yourself now."

"I don't know what to do first!" he wailed.

"Honey, honey..." She came to him and kissed his forehead and the tip of his nose. "You walk out to the highway, see? And stay out of sight. Go down the road about a quarter of a mile and flag a bus. Don't ride in anything else but a bus. When you get to town wait at the station until about nine o'clock in the morning and then find yourself a room in a rooming house. A quiet one on a small street. Don't spend too much money. Get yourself a job as soon as you can. You better be a boy, so the Maneater won't know where to look."

"Am I going to grow?" he asked, voicing the professional fear of all midgets.

"Maybe. That depends. Don't go looking for Kay and that Armand creature until you're ready for it."

"How will I know when I'm ready?"

"You'll know. Got your bankbook? Keep on banking by mail, the way you always have. Got enough money? Good. You'll be all right, Horty. Don't ask anyone for anything. Don't tell anyone anything. Do things for yourself, or do without."

"I don't—belong out there," he muttered.

"I know. You will, though; just the way you came to belong here. You'll see."

Moving gracefully and easily on high heels, Horty went to the door. "Well, good-by, Zee. I—I wish I—Couldn't you come with me?"

She shook her glossy dark head. "I wouldn't dare, Kiddo. I'm the only *human being* the Maneater talks to—really talks to. And I've—got to watch what he's doing."

"Oh." He never asked what he should not ask. Childish, helpless, implicity obedient, the exact, functional product of his environment, he gave her a frightened smile and

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turned to the door. "Good bye, honey," she whispered, smiling.

When he had gone she sank down on his bunk and cried. She cried all night. It was not until the next morning that she remembered Junky's jewelled eyes.

CHAPTER VII

A DOZEN years had passed since Kay Hallowell had seen from the back window, Horty Bluett climb into a brilliantly painted truck, one misty night. Those years had not treated the Hallowells kindly. They had moved into a smaller house, and then into an apartment, where her mother died. Her father had hung on for a while longer, and then had joined his wife, and Kay, at nineteen, left college in her junior year and went to work to help her brother through pre-medical school.

She was a cool blonde, careful and steady, with eyes like twilight. She carried a great deal on her shoulders, and she kept them squared. Inwardly she was afraid to be frightened, afraid to be impressionable, to be swayed, to be moved, so that outwardly she wore carefully constructed poise. She had a job to do; she had to get ahead herself so that she could help Bobby through the arduous process of becoming a doctor. She had to keep her self-respect, which meant decent housing and decent clothes. Maybe some day she could relax and have fun, but not now. Not tomorrow or next week. Just some day. Now, when she went out to dance, or to a show, she could only enjoy herself cautiously, up to the point where late hours, or a strong new interest, or even enjoyment itself, might interfere with her job. And this was a great pity, for she had a deep and brimming reservoir of laughter.

"Good Morning, Judge." How she hated that man, with his twitching nostrils and his limp white hands. Her boss, T. Spinney Hartford, of Benson, Hartford and Hartford, was a nice enough man but he certainly hobnobbed with some specimens. Oh well: that's the law business. "Mr. Hartford will be with you in a moment. Please sit down, Judge."

Not there, Wet-Eyes! Oh dear, right next to her desk. Well, he always did.

She flashed him a meaningless smile and went to the filing cabinets across the room before he could start that part weak, part bewildering line of his. She hated the waste of time; there was nothing she needed from the files. But she couldn't sit there and ignore him, and she knew he wouldn't shout across the office at her; he preferred the technique described by Thorne Smith as "a voice as low as his intentions."

She felt his moist gaze on her back, on her hips, rolling up and down the seams of her stockings, and she had an attack of gooseflesh that all but itched. This wouldn't do. Maybe short range would be better; perhaps she could parry what she couldn't screen. She returned to her desk, gave him the same lipped smile, and pulled out her typewriter, swinging it up on its smooth countersprung swivels. She ran in some letterhead and began to type busily.

"Miss Hallowell."

She typed.

"Miss Hallowell." He reached and took her wrist. "Please don't be so very busy. We have such a brief moment together."

SHE LET her hands fall into her lap—one of them, at least. She let the other hang unresisting in the Judge's limp white clasp until he let

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it go. She folded her hands and looked at them. That voice! If she looked up she was sure she would see a trickle of drool on his chin. "Yes, Judge?"

"Do you enjoy it here?"

"Yes. Mr. Hartford is very kind."

"A most agreeable man. Most agreeable." He waited until Kay felt so stupid, sitting there staring at her hands, that she had to raise her face. Then he said, "You plan to stay here for quite a while, then."

"I don't see why—that is, I'd like to."

"The best-laid plans..." he murmured. Now, what was that? A threat to her job? What did this slavering stuffed-shirt have to do with her job? *"Mr. Hartford is a most agreeable man."* Oh, Oh dear. Mr. Hartford was a lawyer, and frequently had cases in Surrogate. Some of those were hairline decisions on which a lot depended. *"Most agreeable."* Of course Mr. Hartford was an agreeable man. He had a living to make.

Kay waited for the next gambit. It came.

"You really won't have to work here more than two more years, as I understand it."

"Wh—why? Oh. How did you know about that?"

"My dear girl," he said, with an insipid modesty. "I naturally know the contents of my files. Your father was most provident, and very wise. When you are twenty-one, you'll be in for a comfortable bit of money, eh?"

It's none of your business, you old lynx. "Why, I'll hardly notice that, Judge. That's earmarked for Bobby, my brother. It will put him through his last two years and a year of specialization too, if he wants it. And we won't have to lose a wink of sleep over anything from then on. We're just keeping above water until then. But I'll go on working."

"Admirable." He twitched his nostrils at her, and she bit her lip and looked down at her hands again. "Very lovely," he added appreciatively. Again she waited. Move Three took place. He sighed. "Did you know there was a lien on your father's estate, for an old partnership matter?"

"I—had heard that. The old agreements were torn up when the partnership was dissolved in Daddy's trucking business."

"One set of papers was not torn up. I still have them. Your father was a trusting man."

"That account was squared twice over, Judge!" Kay's eyes could, sometimes, take on the slate color of thunderclouds. They did now.

The Judge leaned back and put his fingertips together. "It is a matter which could get to court. To Surrogate, by the way."

HE COULD get her job. Maybe he could get the money and with it, Bobby's career. The alternative...well, she could expect that now.

She was so right.

"Since my dear wife departed—" (She remembered his dear wife. A cruel, empty-headed creature with wit enough to cater to his ego in the days before he became a judge, and nothing else) "—I am a very lonely man, Miss Hallowell. I have never met anyone quite like you. You have beauty, and you could be clever. You can go far. I would like to know you better," he simpered.

Over my dead body. "You would?" she said inanely, stiff with disgust and fear.

He underlined it. "A lovely girl like you, with such a nice job, and with that little nest-egg coming to

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you—if nothing happens." He leaned forward. "I'm going to call you Kay from now on. I'm sure we understand each other."

"No!" She said it because she did understand, not because she didn't.

He took it his way. "Then I'd be happy to explain further," he chuckled. "Say tonight. Quite late tonight. A man in my position can't—haw!—trip the light fantastic where the lights are bright."

Kay said nothing.

"There's a little place," sniggered the Judge, "called Club Nemo, on Oak Street. Know it?"

"I think I have—noticed it," she said with difficulty.

"One o'clock," he said cheerfully. He stood up and leaned over her. He smelled like soured after-shave. "I do not like to stay up late for nothing. I'm sure you'll be there."

Her thoughts raced. She was furious, and she was frightened, two emotions which she had avoided for years. She wanted to do several things. She wanted primarily to scream, and to get rid of her breakfast then and there. She wanted to tell him some things about himself. She wanted to storm into Mr. Hartford's office and demand to know if this, this, and that were included in her duties as a stenographer.

But then, there was Bobby, so close to a career. She knew what it was to have to quit on the home-stretch. And poor, fretting, worried Mr. Hartford; he meant no harm, but he wouldn't know how to handle a thing like this. And one more thing, a thing the Judge apparently did not suspect—her proven ability to land on her feet.

So instead of doing any of the things she wanted to do, she smiled timidly and said, "We'll see..."

"We'll see each other," he amended. "We'll see a great deal of each other." She felt that moist gaze again on the nape of her neck as he moved off, felt it on her armpits.

A light on her switchboard glowed. "Mr. Hartford will see you now, Judge Bluett," she said.

He pinched her cheek. "You can call me Armand," he whispered. "When we're alone, of course."

CHAPTER VIII

HE WAS there when she arrived. She was late—only a few minutes, but they cost a great deal. They were minutes added to the hours of fuming hatred, of disgust, and of fear which she had gone through after the Judge's simpering departure from the Hartford offices that morning.

She stood for a moment just inside the club. It was quiet—quiet lights, quiet colors, quiet music from a three-piece orchestra. There were very few customers, and none she knew. She caught a glimpse of silver hair in the corner back of the jutting corner of the bandstand at a shadowed table. She went to it more because she knew he would choose such a spot than because she recognized him.

He stood up and pulled out a chair for her. "I knew you'd come."

How could I get out of it, you toad? "Of course I came," she said. "I'm sorry you had to wait."

"I'm glad you're sorry. I'd have to make you sorry, if you weren't." He laughed when he said it, and only served to stress the pleasure he felt at the thought. He ran the back of his hand over her forearm, leaving a new spoor of gooseflesh. "Kay. Pretty little Kay," he moaned. "I've got to tell you something. I really put some pressure on you this morning."

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You don't say! "You did?" she asked.

"You must have realized it. Well, I want you to know right away, right now, that I didn't mean any of that—except about how lonely I am. People don't realize that as well as being a judge, I'm a man."

That makes me one of the people. She smiled at him. This was a rather complicated process. It involved the fact that in this persuasive, self-pitying speech his voice had acquired a whine, and his features the down-drawn character of a spaniel's face. She half-closed her eyes to blur his image, and got such a startling facsimile of a mournful hound's head over his wing collar that she was reminded of an overheard remark: "He's that way through having been annoyed, at an early age, by the constant barking of his mother." Hence the smile. He misunderstood it and the look that went with it and stroked her arm again. Her smile vanished, though she still showed her teeth.

"What I mean is," he crooned, "I just want you to like me for myself. I'm sorry I had to use any pressure. It's just that I didn't want to fail. Anyway, all's fair...you know."

"—in love and war," she said dutifully. And this means war. Love me for myself alone, or else.

"I won't ask much of you," he said out of wet lips. "It's only that a man wants to feel cherished."

She closed her eyes so he could not see them roll heavenward. He wouldn't ask much. Just sneaking and skulking to protect his "position" in the town. Just that face, that voice, those hands...the swine, the blackmailer, the doddering, slimy-fingered old *wolf! Bobby, Bobby*, she thought in anguish, *be a* good *doctor...*

THERE was more of it, much more. A drink arrived. His choice for a sweet young girl. A sherry flip. It was too sweet and the foam on it grabbed unpleasantly at her lipstick. She sipped and let the Judge's sentimental slop wash over her, nodded and smiled, and, as often as she could, tuned out the sound of his voice and listened to the music. It was competent and clean—Hammond Solovox, string bass, and guitar—and for a while it was the only thing in the whole foul world she could hold on to.

Judge Bluett had, it seemed, a little place tucked away over a store in the slums. "The Judge works in the court and his chambers," he intoned, "and has a fine residence on The Hill. But Bluett the Man has a place too, a comfortable spot, a diamond in a rough setting, a place where he can cast aside the black robes, his dignities and his honors, and learn again that he has red blood in his veins."

"It must be very nice," she said.

"One can hide there," he said expansively. "I should say, *two* can hide there. All the conveniences. A cellar at your elbow, a larder at your beck and call. A civilized-wilderness for a loaf of bread, a jug of wine, and—th-h-owoo." He ended with a hoarse whisper, and Kay had the insane feeling that if his eyes protruded another inch, a man could sit on one and saw the other off.

She closed her eyes again and explored her resources. She felt that she had possibly twenty seconds of endurance left. Eighteen. Sixteen. Oh, this is fine. Here goes Bobby's career up in smoke—in a mushroom-shaped cloud at a table for two.

He gathered his feet under him and rose. "You'll excuse me for a moment," he said, not quite clicking his

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heels. He made a little joke about powder rooms, and obviously being human. He turned away and turned back and pointed out that this was only the first of the little intimacies they would come to learn of each other. He turned away and turned back and said "Think it over. Perhaps we can slip away to our little dreamland this very night!" He turned away and if he had turned back again he would have gotten a French heel in the area of his watch-pocket.

Kay sat alone at the table and visibly wilted. Anger and scorn had sustained her; now, for a moment, fear and weariness took their places. Her shoulders sagged and turned forward and her chin went down, and a tear slid out onto her cheek. This was three degrees worse than awful. This was too much to pay for a Mayo Clinic full of doctors. She wanted out. Something had to happen, right now.

Something did. A pair of hands appeared on the tablecloth in front of her.

She looked up and met the eyes of the young man who stood there. He had a broad, unremarkable face. He was nearly as blond as she, though his eyes were dark. He had a good mouth. He said, "A lot of people don't know the difference between a musician and a potted palm when they go to pour their hearts out. You're in a spot, Ma'am."

Some of her anger returned, but it subsided, engulfed in a flood of embarrassment. She could say only, "Please leave me alone."

"I can't. I heard that routine." He tossed his head toward the rest rooms. "There's a way out, if you'll trust me."

"I'll keep the devil I know," she said coldly.

"You listen to me. I mean listen, until I'm finished. Then you can do as you like. When he comes back, stall him off for tonight. Promise to meet him here tomorrow night. Make it a real good act. Then tell him you shouldn't leave here together; you might be seen. He'll think of that anyway."

"And he leaves, and I'm at your tender mercies?"

"Don't be a goon! Sorry. No, you leave first. Go straight to the station and catch the first train out. There's a northbound at three o'clock and a southbound at three-twelve. Go somewhere else, hole up, find yourself another job, and stay out of sight."

"On what? Three dollars mad-money?"

HE FLIPPED a long wallet out of his inside jacket pocket. "Here's three hundred. You're smart enough to make out all right on that."

"You're crazy! You don't know me, and I don't know you. Besides, I haven't anything up for sale."

He made an exasperated gesture. "Who said anything about that? I said take a train—any train. No one's going to follow you."

"You *are* crazy. How could I get it back to you?"

"You worry about that. I work here. Drop by some time—during the day when I'm not here, if you like, and leave it for me."

"What on earth makes you want to do a thing like that?"

His voice was very gentle. "Say it's the same thing makes me bring raw fish to alley-cats. Oh, stop arguing. You need an out and this is it."

"I can't do a thing like that!"

"You got a good imagination? The kind that makes pictures?"

"I—suppose so."

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"Then, forgive me, but you need a kick in the teeth. If you don't do what I just told you, that crumb is going to—" and in a half-dozen simple, terse words, he told her exactly what that crumb was going to do. Then, with a single deft motion, he slipped the bills into her handbag and got back on the bandstand.

She sat, sick and shaken, until Bluett returned. She had an unusually vivid pictorial imagination.

"While I was gone," he said, settling into his chair and beckoning to the waiter for the check, "know what I was doing?"

That, she thought, is just the kind of question I need right now. Limpidly, she asked, "What?"

"I was thinking about that little place, and how wonderful it would be if I could slip away after a hard day at court, and find you there waiting for me." He smiled fatuously. "And no one would ever know."

Kay sent up a "Lord-forgive-me, I-know-not-what-I-do," and said distinctly, "I think that's a charming idea. Just charming."

"And it wouldn't—*what?*"

For a moment she almost pitied him. Here he had his lines flaked out, his hooks sharpened and greased, and his casting arm worked up to a fine snap, and she'd robbed him of his sport. She'd driven up behind him with a wagon-load of fish. She'd surrendered.

"Well," he said. "Well, I, hm. Hmm-m! Waiter!"

"But," she said archly, "Not tonight, Ar-mand."

"Now, Kay. Just come up and look at it. It's not far."

She figuratively spit on her hands, took a deep breath and plunged—wondering vaguely at just what instant she had decided to take this fantastic course. She batted her eyelashes only a delicate twice, and said softly, "Ar-mand, I'm not an experienced person like you, and I—" she hesitated and dropped her eyes— "I want it to be perfect. And tonight, it's all so sudden, and I haven't been able to look forward to anything, and it's terribly late and we're both tired, and I have to work tomorrow but I won't the day after, and besides—" and here she capped it. Here she generated, on the spot, the most diffuse and colorful statement of her entire life— "Besides," she said, fluttering her hands prettily, "I'm not *ready*."

SHE PEEPED at him from the sides of her eyes and saw his bony face undergo four distinct expressions, one after the other. Again there was that within her which was capable of astonishment; she had been able to think of only three possible reactions to a statement like that. At the same moment the guitarist behind her, in the middle of a fluid *glissando*, got his little finger trapped underneath his A string on the fingerboard.

Before Armand Bluett could get his breath back, she said, "Tomorrow, Ar-mand. But—" She blushed. When she was a child, reading "Ivanhoe" and "The Deerslayer", she used to practice blushing before the mirror. She never could do it. Yet she did it now. "But earlier," she finished.

Her astonishment factor clicked again, this time with the thought, why haven't I ever tried this before?

"Tomorrow night? You'll come?" he said. "You really will?"

"What time, Ar-mand? she asked submissively.

"Well now. Hmp. Ah—say eleven?"

"Oh, it would be crowded here then. Ten, before the shows are over."

"I knew you were clever," he said admiringly.

She grasped the point firmly and

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pressed it. "There are always too many people," she said, looking around. "You know, we shouldn't leave together. Just in case."

He shook his head in wonder, and beamed.

"I'll just—" she paused, looking at his eyes, his mouth. "I'll just go, like that." She snapped her fingers. "No goodbyes..."

She skipped to her feet and ran out, clutching her purse. And as she passed the end of the bandstand, the guitarist, speaking in a voice just loud enough to reach her, and barely moving his lips, said,

"Lady, you ought to have your mouth washed out with bourbon."

CHAPTER IX

HIS HONOR, the Surrogate Armand Bluett, left his chambers early the next afternoon. Dressed in a dark brown business suit and seeing alternately from the corners of his eyes, he taxied across town, paid off the driver, and skulked down a narrow street. He strolled past a certain doorway twice to be sure he was not followed, and then dodged inside, key in hand.

Upstairs, he went through the compact two-and-kitchenette with a fine-toothed comb. He opened all the windows and aired the place out. Stuffed between the cushions on the couch he found a rainbow-hued silk scarf redolent with cheap, dying scent. He dropped it in the incinerator with a snort. "Won't need *that* any more."

He checked the refrigerator, the kitchen shelves, the bathroom cabinet. He ran the water and tested the gas and the lights. He tried the end-table lamps, the torchere, the radio. He ran a small vacuum cleaner over the rugs and the heavy drapes. Finally, grunting with satisfaction, he went into the bathroom and shaved and showered. There followed clouds of talc and a haze of cologne. He pared his toenails, after which he stood before the cheval glass in various abnormal chest-out poses, admiring his reflection through a rose-colored ego.

He dressed carefully in a subdued hound's-tooth check and a tie designed strictly for the contracting pupil, returned to the mirror for a heady fifteen minutes, sat down and painted his nails with colorless polish, and wandered dreamily around fluttering his flabby hands and thinking detailed thoughts, reciting, half-aloud, little lines of witty, sophisticated dialogue. "Who polished your eyes?" he muttered, and "My dear, dear child, that was nothing, really nothing. A study in harmony, before the complex instrumentation of the flesh...no, she's not old enough for that one. Hm. You're the cream in my coffee. No! *I'm* not old enough for that."

So he passed the evening, very pleasantly indeed. At 8:30 he left, to dine sumptuously at a seafood restaurant. At 9:50 he was ensconced at the corner table at Club Nemo, buffing his glittering nails on his lapel and alternately wetting his lips and dabbing at them with a napkin

At ten o'clock she arrived.

Last night he had risen to his feet as she crossed the dance floor. Tonight he was up out of his chair and at her side before she reached it.

This was Kay transformed. This was the concretion of his wildest dreams of her.

Her hair was turned back from her face in soft small billows which framed her face. Her eyes were skillfully shadowed, and seemed to have taken on a violet tinge with their blue. She wore a long cloak of some

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heavy material, and under it, a demure but skin-tight jacket of black cire satin and a black hem-slashed skirt.

"Armand..." she whispered, holding out both hands.

HE TOOK them. His lips opened and closed twice before he could say anything at all, and then she was past him, walking with a long, easy stride to the table. Walking behind her, he saw her pause as the orchestra started up, and throw a glance of disdain at the guitarist. At the table she unclasped the cloak at her throat and let it fall away confidently. Armand Bluett was there to receive it as she slid into her chair. He stood there goggling at her for so long that she laughed at him. "Aren't you going to say anything at all?"

"I'm speechless," he said, and thought, my word, that came out effectively.

A waiter came, and he ordered for her. Daiquiri, this time. No woman he had ever seen reminded him less of a sherry flip.

"I am a very lucky man," he said. That was twice in a row he had said something unrehearsed.

"Not as lucky as I am," she said, and she seemed quite sincere as she said it. She put out just the tip of a pink tongue; her eyes sparkled, and she laughed. For Bluett, the room began to gyrate. He looked down at her hands, toying with the clasp of a tiny cosmetic case.

"I don't think I ever noticed your hands before," he said.

"Please do," she twinkled, "I love the things you say, Ar-mand," and she put her hands in his. They were long, strong hands with square palms and tapered fingers and what certainly must be the smoothest skin in the world.

The drinks came. He let go reluctantly and they both leaned back, looking at each other. She said, "Glad we waited?"

"Oh, yes. Hm. Yes indeed." Suddenly, waiting was intolerable. Almost inadvertently he snatched up his drink and drained it.

The guitarist fluffed a note. She looked pained. Armand said, "It's not too nice here tonight, is it?"

Her eyes glistened. "You know a better place?" she asked softly.

His heart rose up and thumped the lower side of his Adam's apple. "I certainly do," he said when he could.

She inclined her head with an extraordinary, controlled acquiescence that was almost like a deep pain to him. He threw a bill on the table, put her cloak over her shoulders, and led her out.

IN THE CAB he lunged for her almost before the machine was away from the curb. She hardly seemed to move at all, but her body twisted away from him inside the cloak; he found himself with a double handful of cloth while Kay's profile smiled slightly, shaking its head. It was unspoken, but it was a flat "no". It was also a credit to the low frictional index of cire satin.

"I never knew you were like this," he said.

"Like what?"

"You weren't this way last night," he floundered.

"What way, Ar-mand?" she teased.

"You weren't so—I mean, you didn't seem to be sure of yourself at all."

She looked at him. "I wasn't—ready."

"Oh, I see," he lied.

Conversation lapsed after that, until he paid off the cab at the street intersection near his hideout. He was

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beginning to feel that the situation was out of his control. If she controlled it, however, as she had so far, he was more than willing to go along.

Walking down the dirty, narrow street, he said, "Don't look at any of this, Kay. It's quite different upstairs."

"It's all the same, when I'm with you," she said, stepping over some garbage. He was very pleased.

They climbed the stairs, and he flung open the door with a wide gesture. "Enter, fair lady, the land of the lotus-eaters."

She pirouetted in and cooed over the drapes, the lamps, the pictures. He closed the door and shot the bolt, dropped his hat on the couch and stalked toward her. He was about to put his arms around her from behind when she spun away. "What a way to begin!" she sang. "Putting your hat there. Don't you know it's bad luck to put a hat on a bed?"

"This is my lucky day," he pronounced.

"Mine too," she said. "So let's not spoil it. Let's pretend we've been here forever, and we'll be here forever."

He smiled. "I like that."

"I'm glad. That way," she said, stepping away from a corner as he approached, "there's no hurry. Could we have a drink?"

"You may have the moon," he chanted. He opened the kitchenette. "What would you like?"

"Oh, how wonderful. Let me, let me. You go into the other room and sit down, Mister Man. This is woman's work." She shunted him out, and began to mix, busily.

Armand lounged back on the couch with his feet on the rock-maple coffee table, and listened to the pleasant clinking and swizzling noises from the other room. He wondered idly if he could get her to bring his slippers every evening.

SHE GLIDED in, balancing two tall highballs on a small tray. She kept one hand behind her back as she knelt and put the tray down on the coffee table and slipped into an easy-chair.

"What are you hiding?" he asked.

"It's a secret."

"Come over here."

"Let's talk a little while first. Please."

"A little while." He sniggered. "It's your fault, Kay. You're so beautiful. Hm. You make me feel mad—impetuous." He began rubbing his hands together. She closed her eyes. "Armand..."

"Yes, my little one," he answered, patronizingly.

"Did you ever hurt anyone?"

He sat up. "I? Kay, are you afraid?" He puffed his chest out a bit. "Afraid of me? Why, I won't hurt you, baby."

"I'm not talking about me," she said, a little impatiently. "I just asked you—did you ever hurt anyone?"

"Why, of course not. Not intentionally, that is. You must remember—my business is justice."

"Justice." She said it as if it tasted good. "There are two ways of hurting people, Armand—outside, where it shows, and inside, in the mind, where it scars and festers."

"I don't follow you," he said, his pomposity returning as his confusion grew. "Whom have I ever hurt?"

"Kay Hallowell, for one," she said detachedly, "with the kind of pressure you've been putting on. Not because she's a minor; you are only a criminal on paper for that, and even that wouldn't apply in some states."

"Now, look here, young lady—"

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"—but because," she went on calmly, "you have been systematically wrecking what faith she has in humanity. If there is a basic justice, than for that you are a criminal by its standards."

"Kay—what's come over you? What are you talking about? I won't have any more of this!" He leaned back and folded his arms. She sat quietly.

"I know," he said, half to himself, "you're joking. Is that it, baby?"

In the same level, detached tone, she went on speaking. "You are guilty of hurting others in both the ways I mentioned. Physically, where it shows, and psychically. You will be punished in both those ways, *Justice* Bluett."

He blew air from his nostrils. "That is quite enough. I did not bring you here for anything like this. Perhaps I shall have to remind you, after all, that I am not a man to be trifled with. Hm. The matter of your estate—"

"I am not trifling, Armand." She leaned across the low table to him. He put up his hands. "What do you want?" he breathed, before he could stop himself.

"Your handkerchief."

"My h—*what?*"

She plucked it out of his breast pocket. "Thank you." As she spoke she shook it out, brought up two corners and knotted them together. She slipped her left hand through the loop and settled the handkerchief high on her forearm. "I am going to punish you first in the way it doesn't show," she said informatively, "by reminding you, in a way you can't forget, of how you once hurt someone else."

"What kind of nonsense—"

She reached behind her with her right hand and brought out what she had been hiding—a new, sharp, heavy cleaver.

Armand Bluett cowered away, back into the couch cushions. "Kay—no! No!" he panted. His face turned green. "I haven't touched you, Kay! I only wanted to talk. I wanted to help you and—and your brother. Put that thing down, Kay!" He was drooling with terror. "Can't we be friends, Kay?" he whimpered.

"Stop it!" she hissed. She lifted the cleaver high, resting her left hand on the table and leaning toward him. Her face made, line upon plane upon carven curve, a mask of utter contempt. "I told you that your physical punishment comes later. Think about this while you wait for it."

THE CLEAVER arced over and came down, with every ounce of a lithe body behind it. Armand Bluett screamed—a ridiculous, hoarse, thin sound. He closed his eyes. The cleaver crashed into the heavy top of the coffee-table. Armand twisted and scrabbled back into the cushions, crabbed sidewise and backward along the wall until he could go no farther. He stopped ludicrously, on all fours on the couch, backed into the corner, sweat and spittle running off his chin. He opened his eyes.

It had apparently taken him only a split second to make the hysterical move, for she still stood over the table; she still held the handle of the cleaver. Its edge had buried itself in the thick wood, after passing through the flesh and bone of her hand.

She snatched up the bronze letter-opener and thrust it under the handkerchief on her forearm. As she straightened, bright arterial blood spouted from the stumps of three severed fingers. Her face was pale under the cosmetics, but not one whit changed otherwise; it still wore its proud, unadulterated contempt. She

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stood straight and tall, twisting the handkerchief with the handle of the letter-opener, making a tourniquet, and she stared him down. As his eyes fell, she spat, "Isn't this better than what you planned? Now you've got a part of me to keep for your very own. That's much better than using something and giving it back."

The spurting blood had slowed to a dribble as she twisted. Now she went to the chair on which she had left her cosmetic case. Out of it she worried a rubber glove. Holding the tourniquet against her side, she pulled the glove over her hand and snugged it around the wrist.

Armand Bluett began to vomit.

She shouldered into her cloak and went to the door.

When she had drawn back the bolt and opened it, she called back in a velvety, seductive voice, "It's been so wonderful, Ar-mand darling. Let's do it again soon..."

It took Armand's mind nearly an hour to claw its way up out of the pit of panic into which it had fallen. During the hour he hunkered there on the couch in his own filth, staring at the cleaver and the three still white fingers.

Three fingers.

Three *left* fingers.

Somewhere, deep in his mind, that meant something to him. At the moment he refused to let it surface. He feared it would. He knew it would. He knew that when it did, he would know consuming terror.

CHAPTER X

"YES—I AM Pierre Monetre. Come in." He stood aside and the girl entered.

"This is good of you, Mr. Monetre. I know you must be terribly busy. And probably you won't be able to help me at all."

"I might not if I were able," he said. "Sit down."

She took a molded plywood chair which stood at the end of the half desk, half lab bench which took up almost an end wall of the trailer. He looked at her coldly. Soft yellow hair, eyes sometimes slate-blue, sometimes a shade darker than sky-blue; a studied coolness through which he, with his schooled perceptions, could readily see. She is disturbed, he thought; frightened and ashamed of it. He waited.

She said, "There's something I've got to find out. It happened years ago. I'd almost forgotten about it, and then saw your posters, and I remembered...I could be wrong, but if only—" She kneaded her hands together. Monetre watched them, and then returned his cold stare to her face.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Monetre. I can't seem to get to the point. It's all so vague and so—terribly important. The thing is, when I was a little girl, seven or eight years old, there was a boy in my class in school who ran away. He was about my age, and had some sort of horrible run-in with his stepfather. I think he was hurt. His hand. I don't know how badly. I was probably the last one in town to see him. No one ever saw him again."

Monetre picked up some papers, shifted them, put them down again. "I really don't know what I can do about that, Miss—"

"Hallowell. Kay Hallowell. Please hear me out, Mr. Monetre. I've come thirty miles just to see you, because I can't afford to pass up the slightest chance—"

"If you cry, you'll have to get out," he rasped. His voice was so rough that she started. Then he said, with velvet gentleness, "Please go on."

"Th-thank you. I'll be quick...it was just after dark, a rainy, misty night. We lived by the highway, and

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Her features were calm as she casually dropped the cleaver across her fingers . . .

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I went out back for something...I forget...anyway, he was there, by the traffic light. I spoke to him. He asked me not to tell anyone that I had seen him, and I never have, till now. Then—" she closed her eyes, obviously trying to bring back every detail of the memory— "—I think someone called me. I turned to the gate and left him. But I peeped out again, and saw him climbing on the back of a truck that was stopped for the light. It was one of your trucks. I'm sure it was. The way it was painted...and yesterday, when I saw your posters, I thought of it."

Monetre waited, his deep-set eyes expressionless. He seemed to realize, suddenly, that she had finished. "That happened twelve years ago? And, I suppose, you want to know if that boy reached the carnival."

"Yes."

"He did not. If he had, I should certainly have known of it."

"Oh...It was a faint sound, stricken, yet resigned; apparently she had not expected anything else. She pulled herself together visibly, and said, "He was small for his age. He had very dark hair and eyes and a pointed face. His name was Horty—Horton."

"Horty..." Monetre searched his memory. There was a familiar ring to those two syllables, somehow. Now, where...He shook his head. "I don't remember any boy called Horty."

"Please try. *Please!* You see—" She looked at him searchingly, her eyes asking a question. He answered it, saying, "You can trust me."

SHE SMILED. "Thank you. Well, there's a man, a horrible person. He was once responsible for that boy. He's doing a terrible thing to me; it's something to do with an old law case, and he might be able to keep me from getting some money that is due me when I come of age. I need it. Not for myself; it's for my brother. He's going to be a doctor, and—"

"I don't like doctors," said Monetre. If there is a great bell for hatred as there is one for freedom, it rang in his voice as he said that. He stood up. "I know nothing about any boy named Horty, who disappeared twelve years ago. I am not interested in finding him in any case, particularly if doing so would help a man make a parasite of himself and fools of his patients. I am not a kidnapper, and will have nothing to do with a search which reeks of that and blackmail to boot. Good-by."

She had risen with him. Her eyes were round. "I—I'm sorry. Really, I—"

"Good-by." It was the velvet this time, used with care, used to show her that his gentleness was a virtuosity, an overlay. She turned to the door, opened it. She stopped and looked back over her shoulder. "May I leave you my address, just in case, some day, you—"

"You may not," he said. He turned his back on her and sat down. He heard the door close.

He closed his eyes, and his arched, slit nostrils expanded until they were round holes. Humans, humans, and their complex, useless, unimportant machinations. There was no mystery about humans; no puzzle. Everything human could be brought to light by asking simply, "What does it gain you?"... What could humans know of a life-form to which the idea of gain was alien? What could a human say of his crystal-kin, the living jewels which could communicate with each other and did not care to, which could co-operate with each other and scorned to?

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And what—he let himself smile—what would humans do when they had to fight the alien? When they were up against an enemy which would make an advance and then scorn to consolidate it—and then make a different *kind* of advance, in a different way, in another place?

He sank into an esoteric reverie, marshalling his crystallines against teeming, stupid mankind; losing, in his thoughts, the pointless perturbations of a girl in a search for a child long missing, for some petty gainful reason of her own.

"Hey—Maneater."

"*Damn* it! What now?"

The door opened diffidently. "Maneater, there's—"

"Come in, Havana, and speak up. I don't like mumblers."

Havana edged in, after setting his cigar down on the step. "There's a man outside wants to see you."

Monetre glowered over his shoulder. "Your hair's getting gray. What's left of it. Dye it."

"Okay, okay. Right away, this afternoon. I'm sorry." He shifted his feet miserably. "About this man—"

"I've had my quota for today," said Monetre. "Useless people wanting impossible things of no importance. Did you see that girl go out of here?"

"Yes. That's what I'm trying to tell you. So did this guy. See, he was waiting to see you. He asked Johnward where he could find you, and—"

"I think I'll fire Johnward. He's an advance man, not an usher. What business has he, bringing people to annoy me?"

"I guess he thought you ought to see this one. A big-shot," said Havana timidly. "So when he got your trailer, he asked me were you busy. I told him yes, you were talking to someone. He said he'd wait. About then the door opens, and that girl comes out. She puts a hand on the side and turns back to say something to you, and this guy, this big-shot, he blows a fuse. No kidding, Maneater, I never seen anything like it. He grabs my shoulder. I'll have a bruise there for a week. He says, 'It's her! It's her!' and I says 'Who?' and he says, 'Her hand; she's grown it back!' "

MONETRE sat bolt upright and turned in his swivel chair to face the midget. "Go on, Havana," he said in his gentle voice.

"Well, that's all. 'Cept he ducked back behind Gogol's bally-platform and hunkered down out of sight, and peeped out at that girl as she walked past him. She never saw him."

"Where is he now?"

Havana glanced through the door. "Still right there. Looks pretty bad. I think he's having some kind of a fit."

Monetre left his chair and shot through the door, leaving it completely up to Havana whether he got out of the way or not. The midget leaped to the side, out of Monetre's direct path, but not far enough to avoid the bony edge of Monetre's pelvis, which glanced stunningly off Havana's pudgy cheekbone.

Monetre bounded to the side of the man who cowered down behind the bally platform. He knelt and placed a sure hand on the man's forehead, which was clammy and cold.

"It's all right now, sir," he said in a deep, soothing voice. "You'll be perfectly safe with me." He urged the idea "safe", because, whatever the cause might be, the man was sodden, trembling, all but ecstatic with fear. Monetre asked no questions, but kept crooning, "You're in good hands now, sir. Quite safe. Nothing can happen now. Come along; we'll have a drink. You'll be all right."

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The man's watery eyes fixed themselves on him, slowly. Awareness crept into them, and a certain embarrassment. He said, "Hm. Uh—slight attack of—hm...vertigo, you know. Sorry to be...hm."

Monetre courteously helped him up, picked up a brown homburg and dusted it off. "My office is just there. Do come in and sit down."

Monetre kept a firm hand on the man's elbow, led him to the trailer, handed him up the two steps, reached past him and opened the door. "Would you like to lie down for a few minutes?"

"No, no. Thank you; you're very kind."

"Sit here, then. I think you'll find it comfortable. I'll get you something that will make you feel better." He fingered a simple combination latch, chose a bottle of tawny port. From a desk drawer he took a small phial and put two drops of liquid into a glass, filling it with the wine. "Drink this. It will make you feel better. A little sodium amytal—just enough to quiet your nerves."

"Thank you, thank—" He drank it greedily. "—you. Are you Mr. Monetre?"

"At your service."

"I am Judge Bluett. Surrogate, you know. Hm."

"I am honored."

"Not at all, not at all. I am the one who...I drove fifty miles to see you, sir, and would have gladly done twice that. You have a wide reputation."

"I hadn't realized it," said Monetre, and thought, this deflated creature is as insincere as I am. "What can I do for you?"

"Hm. Well, now. Matter of—ah—scientific interest. I read about you in a magazine, you know. Said you know more about fr—ah, strange people, and things like that, than anyone alive."

"I wouldn't say that," said Monetre. "I have worked with them for a great many years, of course. What was it you wanted to know?"

"Oh...the kind of thing you can't get out of reference books. Or ask any so-called scientist, for that matter; they just laugh at things that aren't in some book, somewhere."

"I have experienced that, Judge. I do not laugh readily."

"Splendid. Then I shall ask you. Namely, do you know anything about —ah—regeneration?"

MONETRE CLOAKED his eyes. Would the fool ever get to the point? "What kind of regeneration? The girdle of the nematodes? Cellular healing? Or are you talking about old-time radio receivers?"

"Please," said the judge, and made a flabby gesture. "I'm quite the layman, Mr. Monetre. You'll have to use simple language. What I want to know is—how much of a restoration is possible after a serious cut?"

"How serious a cut?"

"Hm. Call it an amputation."

"Well, now. That depends, Judge. A fingertip, possibly. A chipped bone can grow surprisingly. You—you know of a case where a regeneration has been, shall we say, a bit more than normal?"

There was a long pause. Monetre noticed that the Judge was paling. He poured him more port, and filled a glass for himself. Excitement mounted within him.

"I do know of such a case. At least, I mean...hm. Well, it seemed so to me. That is, I saw the amputation."

"An arm? A leg, perhaps, or a foot?"

"Three fingers. Three whole fingers," said the Judge. "It would seem that they grew back. And in forty-

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eight hours. A well-known osteologist treated the whole thing as a great joke when I asked him about it. Refused to believe I was serious." Suddenly he leaned forward so abruptly that the loose skin of his jaw quivered. "Who was the girl who just left here?"

"An autograph hound," said Monetre in a bored tone. "A person of no importance. Do proceed."

The Judge swallowed with difficulty. "Her name is—Kay Hallowell."

"Perhaps so, perhaps so. Have you changed the subject?" asked Monetre impatiently.

"I have not, sir," the Judge answered notly. "The night before last, that girl, that monster—in good light, and right before my eyes, *chopped off three fingers of her left hand!*" He nodded, pushing his lower lip out, and sat back.

If he expected a sharp reaction, he was not disappointed. Monetre leaped to his feet and bellowed, "Havana!" He strode to the door and yelled again. "Where is that little fat—oh; there you are, Havana. Go and find that girl who just left here. Understand? Find her and bring her back. I don't care what you tell her; find her and bring her back here." He clapped his hands explosively. *"Run!"*

He returned to his chair, his face working. He looked at his hands, then at the judge. "You're quite sure of this."

"I am."

"Which hand?"

"The left." The Judge ran a finger around his collar. "Ah—Mr. Monetre. If that boy should bring her back here, why, ah—I, that is—"

"I gather you are afraid of her."

"Now, ah—I wouldn't say that." said the Judge. "Startled, yes. Hm. Wouldn't you be?"

"No," said Monetre. "You are lying, sir."

"I? Lying?" Bluett puffed up his chest and glowered at the carny boss.

MONETRE half-closed his eyes and began ticking off items on his fingers. "It would seem that what frightened you a few minutes ago was the sight of that girl's left hand. You told the midget that the fingers had grown back. It was obviously the first time you had seen the hand regenerated. And yet you tell me that you have already consulted an osteologist about it."

"There are no lies involved," said Bluett stiffly. "True, I did see the restored hand when she stood in this doorway, and it was the first time. But I also saw her cut those fingers off, two nights ago!"

"Then why," asked Monetre, "come to me to ask questions about regeneration?" Watching the Judge flounder about for an answer, he added, "Come now, Judge Bluett. Either you have not stated your original purpose in coming here, or—you have seen a case of this regeneration before. Ah. I see that's it." His eyes began to burn. "I think you'd better tell me the whole story."

"That *isn't* it!" the Judge protested. "Really, sir, I am not enjoying this cross-questioning. I fail to see—"

Shrewdly, Monetre reached out to touch the fear which hovered so close to this wet-eyed man. "You are in greater danger than you suspect," he interrupted. "I know what that danger is, and I am probably the only man in the world who can help you. You will co-operate with me, sir, or you will leave this instant—and take the consequences." He said this with his flexible voice toned down to a soft, resonating diapason, which apparently frightened the

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Judge half out of his wits. The chain of imaginary horrors which mirrored themselves on Bluett's paling face must have been colorful, to say the least. Smiling slightly, Monetre leaned back in his chair and waited.

"M-may I..." The Judge poured himself more wine. "Ah. Now, sir. I must tell you at the outset that this whole matter has been one of—ah—conjecture on my part. That is, up until I saw the girl just now. By the way—I do not want to have her see me. Could you—"

"When Havana brings her back, I'll get you out of sight. Go on."

"Good. Thank you, sir. Well, some years ago I brought a child into my house. Ugly little monster. When he was seven or eight years old, he ran away from home. I have not heard of him since. I imagine he would be nineteen or so by this time—if he's alive. And—and there seems to be some connection between him and this girl."

"What connection?" Monetre prompted.

"Well, sh-she seemed to know something about him." As Monetre shifted his feet impatiently, he blurted, "Fact is, there was a little trouble. The boy was downright rebellious. I thrashed him and shoved him into a closet. His hand—quite accidentally, you realize—his hand was crushed in the hinge of the door. Hm. Yes—very unpleasant."

"Go on."

"I've been—ah—looking, you know—that is, if that boy has grown up, he might be resentful, you understand...besides, he was a most unbalanced child, and one never knows how these things might affect a weak mind—"

"You mean you feel guilty as hell and scared to boot, and you've been watching for a young man with some fingers missing. Fingers—get to the point! What has this to do with the girl?" Monetre's voice was a whip.

"I can't—say exactly," mumbled the Judge. "She seemed to know something about the boy. I mean, she hinted something about him—said that she was going to remind me of a way I had—hurt someone once. And then she took a cleaver and cut off her fingers."

MONETRE closed his eyes and thought, hard. "There was nothing wrong with her fingers when she was in here."

"Damn it, I know that! But I tell you, I saw, with my own eyes—"

"All right, all right. She cut them off. Now, exactly why did you come here?"

"I began thinking, that's all. When something like that happens it makes you forget everything you know and start right from scratch. What I saw was impossible, and I began thinking in a way that let anything be possible...anyth—"

"Come to the point!" roared the Maneater.

"There is none!" Bluett roared back. They glared at each other for a crackling moment. "That's what I'm tryng to tell you; I don't know. I remembered that child and his crushed fingers, and there was this girl and what she did. I began wondering if she and the boy were the same... I told you 'impossible' didn't matter any more. Well, the girl had a perfectly good hand before she chopped into it. If, somehow, she was that boy, he must have grown the fingers back. If he could do it once, he could do it again. If he knew he could do it again, he wouldn't be afraid to cut them off." The judge threw up his hands and shrugged, and let his arms fall limply. "So I began to wonder what man-

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ner of creature could grow fingers at will. I read about you in a magazine, and I thought, if anyone would know about such a crazy thing, Monetre would. That's all."

Monetre made wide eaves of his lids, his burning dark eyes studying the Judge. "This—boy who might be a girl," he murmured. "What was his name?"

"Horton. Horty, we called him. Vicious little scut."

"Think, now. Was there anything strange about him as a child?"

"I should say so! I don't think he was sane. Clinging to baby-toys—that sort of thing. And he had filthy habits."

"What filthy habits?"

"He was expelled from school for eating insects."

"Ah! Ants?"

"How did you know?"

Monetre rose, paced to the door and back. Excitement began to thump in his chest. "What baby-toys did he cling to?"

"Oh, I don't remember. It isn't important."

"I'll decide that?" snapped Monetre. "Think, man! If you value your life—"

"I can't think! I can't!" Bluett looked up at the Maneater, and quailed before those blazing eyes. "It was some sort of a jack-in-the-box. A hideous thing."

"What did it look like? Speak up, damn it!"

"What does it—oh, all right. It was this big, and it had a head on it like a Punch—you know, Punch and Judy. Big nose and chin. The boy hardly ever looked at it. But he had to have it near him. I threw it away one time and the doctor made me find it and bring it back. Horton almost died."

"He did, eh?" grunted Monetre tautly, triumphantly. "Now tell me—that toy had been with him since he was born, hadn't it? And there was something about it—some sort of jewelled button, or something glittery?"

"How did you know—" Bluett began again, and again quailed under the radiation of furious, excited impatience from the carny boss. "Yes. The eyes."

Monetre flung himself on the Judge. He grasped his shoulders, shook him. "You said 'eye', didn't you? There was only one jewel?" he panted.

"Don't—don't—" wheezed Bluett, pushing weakly at Monetre's taloned hands. "I said 'eyes'. Two eyes. They were both the same. Nasty looking things. Seemed to have a light of their own."

Monetre straightened slowly, backed off. "Two of them," he breathed. "*Two...*"

HE CLOSED his eyes, his brain humming. Disappearing boy, fingers...fingers crushed. Girl... the right age, too... Horton. Horton... Horty. His mind looped and wheeled back over the years. A small brown face, peaked with pain, saying "My folks called me Hortense, but everyone calls me Kiddo." Kiddo, who had arrived with a crushed hand, and had left the carnival two years ago. What had happened when she left? He had wanted something, wanted to examine her hand, and she left during the night.

That hand. When she first arrived, he had cleaned it up, trimmed away the ruined flesh, sewed it up. He had treated it every day for weeks, until the scar-tissue was fused over, and there was no further danger of infection; and then, somehow or other he had never looked at it again. Why not? Oh—Zena. Zena had always told

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him how Kiddo's hand was getting along.

He opened his eyes—slits, now. "I'll find him," he snarled.

There was a knock at the door, and a voice. "Maneater—"

"It's the midget," babbled Bluett, leaping up. "With the girl. What shall I—where shall—"

Monetre sent him a look which wilted him, tumbled him back in his chair. The carny boss rose and stilted to the door, opening it a crack. "Get her?"

"Gosh, Maneater, I—"

"I don't want to hear it," said Monetre in a terrible whisper. "You didn't bring her back. I sent you to get her and you didn't do it." He closed the door with great care and turned to the Judge. "Go away."

"Eh? Hm. But what about the—"

"Go away!" It was a scream. As his glare had made Bluett limp, his voice stiffened him. The Judge was on his feet and moving doorward before the scream had ceased to be a sound. He tried to speak, and succeeded only in moving his wet mouth.

"I'm the only one in the world who can help you," said Monetre; and the Judge's face showed that this easy, quiet, conversational tone was the most shocking thing of all. He went to the door and paused. Monetre said, "I will do what I can, Judge. You'll hear from me very soon, you may be sure of that."

"Ah," said the Judge. "Mm. Any thing I can do, Mr. Monetre. Call on me. Anything at all."

"Thank you. I shall certainly need your help." Monetre's bony features froze the instant he stopped speaking. Bluett fled.

Pierre Monetre stood staring at the space where the Judge's bloated face had just been. Suddenly he balled his fist and smashed it into his palm. "Zena!" said only his lips. He went pale with fury, weak with it, and went to his desk. He sat down, put his elbows on the blotter and his chin in his hand, and began to send out waves of feral hatred and demand.

Zena!

Zena!

Here! Come Here!

CHAPTER XI

HORTY LAUGHED. He looked at his left hand, at the three stubs of fingers which rose, like unspread mushrooms, from his knuckles, touched the scar-tissue around them with his other hand, and he laughed.

He rose from the studio couch and crossed the wide room to the cheval glass, to stare at his face, to stand back and look critically at his shoulders, his profile. He grunted in satisfaction and went to the telephone in the bedroom.

"Three four four," he said. His voice was resonant, well suited to the cast of his solid chin and his wide mouth. "Nick? This is Sam Horton. Oh, fine. Sure, I'll be able to play again. The doc says I was lucky. A broken wrist usually heals pretty stiff, but this one won't. No—don't worry. Hm? About six weeks. Positively... Gold? Thanks Nick, but I'll get along. No, don't worry—I'll yell if I need any. Thanks, though. Yeah, I'll drop by every once in a while. I was in there a couple days ago. Where did you find that three-chord bubblehead you have on guitar? He does by accident what Spike Jones does on purpose. No, I didn't want to hit him. I wanted to husk him." He laughed. "I'm kidding. He's okay. Well, thanks, Nick. 'Bye." Chuckling, he hung up.

The doorbell rang.

Horty stopped moving. It was not a freeze, the startled immobilization of a frightened animal. It was more

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a controlled, relaxed split second for thought. Then he moved again, balanced and easily.

At the door he paused, staring at the lower panel. His face tightened, and a swift frown rippled on his brow. He flung the door open.

She stood crookedly in the hallway, looking up at him with her eyes. Her head was turned sidewise and a little downward. She had to strain her eyes painfully to meet his; she was only four feet tall.

She said, faintly, "Horty?"

He made a hoarse sound and knelt, pulling her into his arms, holding her with power and gentleness. "Zee... Zee, what happened? Your face, your—" He picked her up and kicked the door shut and carried her over to the studio couch, to sit with her across his knees, cradled in his arms, her head resting in the warm strong hollow of his right hand. She smiled at him. Only one side of her mouth moved. Then she began to cry, and Horty's own tears curtained from him the sight of her ravaged face.

Her sobs stopped soon, as if she were simply too tired to continue. She looked at his face, all of it, part by part. She brought her hand up and touched his hair. "Horty..." she whispered. "I loved you so much the way you were..."

"I haven't changed," he said. "I'm a big grown-up man now. I have an apartment and a job. I have this voice and these shoulders and I weigh a hundred pounds more than I did three years ago." He bent and kissed her quickly. "But I haven't changed, Zee. I haven't changed." He touched her face, a careful, feathery contact. "Do you hurt?"

"Some." She closed her eyes and wet her lips. Her tongue seemed unable to reach one corner of her mouth. "I've changed."

"You've *been* changed," he said, his voice shaking. "The Maneater?"

"Of course. You knew, didn't you?"

"Not really. I thought once you were calling me. Or he was...it was far away. But anyway, no one else would have—would...what happened? Do you want to tell me?"

"Oh yes. He—found out about you. I don't understand how. Your—that Armand Bluett—he's a judge or something now. He came to see the Maneater. He thought you were a girl. A big girl, I mean."

"I was, for a while." He smiled tensely.

"Oh. Oh, I see. Were you really at the carnival that day?"

"At the carnival? No. What day, Zee? You mean when he found out?"

"Yes. Four—no; five days ago. You weren't there. I don't under—" She shrugged. "Anyway, a girl came to see the Maneater and the Judge saw her and thought she was you. The Maneater thought so too. He sent Havana looking for her. Havana couldn't find her."

"And then the Maneater got hold of you."

"Mm. I didn't mean to tell him, Horty. I didn't. Not for a long time, anyway. I—forget." She closed her eyes again. Horty trembled suddenly, and then could breathe.

"I don't...remember," she said with difficulty.

"Don't try. Don't talk any more," he murmured.

"I want to. I've got to. He mustn't find you!" she said. "He's hunting for you right this minute!"

Horty's eyes narrowed and he said, "Good."

HER EYES were still closed. She said, "It was a long time. He talked very quietly. He gave me cushions and some wine that tasted

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like autumn. He talked about the carnival and Solum and Gogol. He mentioned 'Kiddo' and then talked about the new flat cars and the commissary tent and the trouble with the roustabouts' union He said something about the musicians' union and something about music and something about the guitar and then about the act we used to have. Then he was off again about the menageries and the shills and the advance men, and back again. You see? Just barely mentioning you and going away and coming back and back. All night, Horty, all, all *night!*"

"Sh-h-h."

"He wouldn't ask me! He talked with his head turned away watching me out of the corners of his eyes. I sat and tried to sip the wine, and tried to eat when Cooky brought dinner and midnight lunch and breakfast, and tried to smile when he stopped for a minute. He didn't touch me, he didn't hit me, he didn't *ask* me!"

"He did later," breathed Horty.

"Much later. I don't remember... his face over me like a moon, once. I hurt all over. He shouted. Who is Horty, where is Horty, who is Kiddo, why did I hide Kiddo....I woke up and woke up. I don't remember the times I slept, or fainted, or whatever it was. I woke up with my blood in my eyes, drying, and he was talking about the ride mechanics and the power for the floodlights. I woke up in his arms, he was whispering in my ear about Bunny and Havana, they must have known what Horty was. I woke up on the floor. My knee hurt. There was a terrible light. I jumped up with the pain of it. I ran out the door and fell down, my knee wouldn't work, it was in the afternoon and he caught me and dragged me back again and threw me on the floor and made the light again. He had a burning glass and he gave me vinegar to drink. My tongue swelled, I—"

"Sh-h-h. Zena, honey, hush. Don't say any more."

The flat, uninflected voice went on. "I lay still when Bunny looked in and the Maneater didn't know she saw what he was doing and Bunny ran away and Havana came and hit the Maneater with a piece of pipe and the Maneater broke his neck he's going to die and I—"

Horty's eyelids felt dry. He raised a careful hand and slapped her smartly across her undamaged cheek. "Zena! *Stop it!*"

At the impact she uttered a great shriek, and screamed, "I don't *know* any more, *truly* I don't!" and burst into painful, writhing sobs. Horty tried to speak to her but could not be heard through her weeping. He stood, turned, put her down gently on the couch, ran and wrung out a cloth in cold water and bathed her face and wrists. She stopped crying abruptly and fell asleep.

Horty watched her until her breathing assured him that she was at peace. He put his head slowly down beside hers as he knelt on the floor beside the couch. Her hair was on his forehead. Half-crossing his arms, he grasped his elbows and began to pull them. He kept the tension until his shoulders and chest throbbed with pain. He needed to be near her, would not move, yet must relieve the black tension of fury which built in him, and the work his muscles did against each other saved his sanity without the slightest movement to disturb the sleeping girl. He knelt there for a long time.

AT BREAKFAST the next morning she could laugh again. Horty had not moved her or touched her

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except to remove her shoes and cover her with a down quilt. In the small hours of the morning he had taken a pillow from the bedroom and put it on the floor between the studio couch and the door, and had stretched out to listen to her breathing and, with feline attention, to each sound from the stairway and hall outside.

He was standing, bent over her, when she opened her eyes. He said immediately, "I'm Horty and you're safe, Zee." The spiralling panic in her eyes died unborn, and she smiled.

While she bathed, he took her clothes to a neighborhood machine laundry and in half an hour was back with them washed and dried. The food he had picked up on the way was not needed; she had breakfast well on the way when he returned—"gas-house" eggs (fried in the center of slices of bread punched out with a water glass) and crisp bacon. She took the groceries from him and scolded him. "Kippers—papaya juice—Danish ring. Horty, that's *company* eatments!"

He smiled, more at her courage and her resilience than at her attitude. He leaned against the wall with his arms folded, watching her hobbling about the kitchen, draped from neck to heels in what was, for him, a snug-fitting bathrobe, and tried not to think of the fact that she had used it at all. He understood, though, seeing the limp, seeing what had happened to her face...

It was a gay breakfast, during which they happily played "Remember when—" which is, in the final analysis, the most entrancing game in the world. Then there was a silent time, when to each, the sight of the other was enough communication. At last Horty asked, "How did you get away?"

Her face darkened. The effort for control was evident—and successful. Horty said, "You'll have to tell me everything, Zee. You'll have to tell me about—me, too."

"You've found out a lot about yourself." It was not a question.

Horty waved this aside. "How did you get away?"

The mobile side of her face twitched. She looked down at her hands, slowly lifted one, put it on and around the other, and as she talked, squeezed. "I was in a coma for days, I guess. Yesterday I woke up on my bunk, in the trailer. I knew I had told him everything—except that I knew where you were. He still thinks you are that girl.

"I heard his voice. He was at the other end of the trailer, in Bunny's room. Bunny was there. She was crying. I heard the Maneater taking her away. I waited and then dragged myself outside and over to Bunny's door. I got in. Havana was there on the bed with a stiff thing around his neck. It hurt him to talk. He said the Maneater was taking care of him, fixing his neck. He said the Maneater is going to make Bunny do a job for him." She looked up swiftly at Horty. "He can, you know. He's a hypnotist. He can make Bunny do anything."

"I know." He considered her. "Why the hell didn't he use it on you?" he flared

She fingered her face. "He can't. He—it doesn't work like that on me. He can reach me, but he can't make me do anything. I'm too—"

"Too what?"

"Human," she said.

He stroked her arm and smiled at her. "That you are...Go on."

"I went back to my part of the trailer and got some money and a few other things and left. I don't know what the Maneater will do

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when he learns I'm gone. I was very careful, Horty. I hitch-hiked fifty miles and then took a bus to Eltonville—that's three hundred miles from here—and a train from there. But I know he'll find me somehow, sooner or later. He doesn't give up."

"You're safe here," he said, and there was blued steel in his soft voice.

"It isn't me! Oh, Horty—don't you understand? It's you he's after!"

"What does he want with me? I left the carnival three years ago and it didn't seem to bother him much." He caught her eye; she was looking at him in amazement. "What is it?"

"Aren't you curious about yourself at all, Horty?"

"About myself? Well, sure. Everybody is, I guess. But about what, especially?"

SHE WAS silent a moment, thinking. Abruptly she asked, "What have you done since you left the carnival?"

"I've told you in my letters."

"The bare outlines, yes. You got a furnished room and lived there for a while, reading a lot and feeling your way. Then you decided to grow. How long did that take?"

"About eight months. I got this by mail and moved in at night so no one saw me, and changed. Well, I had to. I'd be able to get a job as a grown man. I buskined a while—you know, playing the clubs for whatever the customers would throw to me—and bought a really good guitar and went to work at the Happy Hours. When that closed I went to Club Nemo. Been there ever since, biding my time. You told me I'd know when it was time...that's always been true."

"It would be," she nodded. "Time to stop being a midget, time to go to work, time to start on Armand Bluett—you'd know."

"Well, sure," he said, as if the fact deserved no further comment. "But look—you don't know what happened with Armand."

"No." She looked at his hand. "It has something to do with that, hasn't it?"

"It has." He inspected it and smiled. "Last time you saw my hand like this was about a year after I came to the carnival. Want to know something? I lost these fingers just eleven days ago."

"And they've grown that much?"

"It doesn't take as long as it did," he said.

"It did start slowly," she said.

He looked at her, seemed about to ask a question, and then went on. "One night at Club Nemo he walked in with her. I'd never dreamed that I'd seen them together—I know what you're thinking! I always thought of them at the same time! Ah, but that was check and balance: Good and evil. Well..." He drank coffee. "They sat right where I could hear them talk. He was the oily wolf and she was the distressed maiden. It was pretty disgusting. So, he got up to powder his nose, and I made like Lochinvar. I mixed right in. I gave her some succinct language and some carfare, and she got away, after promising him a date for the next night."

"You mean she got away from him for the moment."

"Oh no. She got clear away, by train. I don't know where she went. Well, I sat there chording that guitar and thinking hard. You said that I'd always know when it was time. I knew that night that it was time to get Armand Bluett. Time to start, that is. He gave me a treatment once that lasted for six years. The least I could do was to give him a long stretch too. So I made my plans. I put in a tough night and day." He

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stopped, smiling without humor.

"Horty—"

"I'll tell it, Zee. It's simple enough. He got his date. Took the gal to a sybaritic little pest-hole he had hidden away in the slums. He was very easy to lead along the primrose paving. At the critical point his 'conquest' said a few well-chosen words about cruelty to children and left him to mull them over while staring at the three fingers she had chopped off as souvenirs."

Zena glanced at his left hand again. "Uh! What a treatment! But Horty—you got ready in one night and day?"

"You don't know the things I can do," he said. He rolled back his sleeve. "Look."

She stared at the brown, slightly hairy right forearm. Horty's face showed deep concentration. There was no tension; his eyes were quiet and his brow unfurrowed.

FOR A MOMENT the arm remained unchanged. Suddenly the hair on it moved—*writhed.* One hair fell off; another; a little shower of them, finding their way down among the small checks of the tablecloth. The arms remained steady and, like his brow, showed no tension beyond its complete immobility. It was naked now, and the creamy brown color that was typical of both him and Zena. But—was it? Was it the effect of staring with such concentration? No; it was actually paler, paler and more slender as well. The flesh on the back of the hand and between the fingers contracted until the hand was slim and tapered rather than square and thick as it had been.

"That's enough," said Horty conversationally, and smiled. "I can restore it in the same length of time. Except for the hair, of course. That will take two or three days."

"I knew about this," she breathed. "I did know, but I don't think I ever really believed...your control is quite complete?"

"Quite. Oh, there are things I can't do. You can't create or destroy matter. I could shrink to your size. I suppose. But I'd weigh the same as I do now, pretty much. And I couldn't become a twelve-foot giant overnight; there's no way to assimilate enough mass quickly enough. But that job with Armand Bluett was simple. Hard work, but simple. I compacted my shoulders and arms and the lower part of my face. Do you know I had twenty-eight toothaches the whole time? I whitened my skin. The hair was a wig, of course, and so for the female form deevine, that was taken care of by what Elliot Springs calls the 'bust-bucket and torso-twister trade.'"

"How can you joke about it?"

His voice went flat as he said, "What should I do; grind my teeth *every* minute? This kind of wine needs a shot of bubbles every now and then, honey, or you go out of your mind. No; what I did to Armand Bluett was just a starter. I'm making him do it himself. I didn't tell him who I am. Kay's out of the picture; he doesn't know who she is or who I am or, for that matter, who he is himself." He laughed; an unpleasant sound. "All I gave him was a powerful association with three ruined fingers from 'way back. They'll work in his sleep. The next thing I do to him will be as good—and nothing like that at all."

"You'll have to change your plans some."

"Why?"

"Kay isn't out of the picture. I'm beginning to understand now. She came out to the carnival to see the Maneater."

"*Kay* did? But why?"

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"I don't know. Thing is, the Judge was out there at the time and saw her. I imagine he wanted to get a lead on you from the Maneater—Pierre Monetre is an authority on strange people, you know. Anyway he saw Kay—"

Horty slapped the table. "With her hand intact! Oh, how wonderful! Can you imagine what that must have been?"

"Horty, darling—it isn't all fun. Don't you see that that's what started all this—that's what made the Maneater suspect that 'Kiddo' was something else besides a girl midget? Don't you realize that the Maneater thinks you and Kay are the same one, no matter what the Judge thinks?"

"Oh, my God."

"You remember everything you hear," said Zena. "But you just don't figure things out very fast, sweetheart."

"But—but—you're getting smashed up like this... Zena, it's my fault! It's as if I'd done it to you!"

She came around the table and put her arms around him, pulling his head to her breast. "No, darling. That was coming to me, from years back. If you want to blame someone—besides the Maneater—blame me. It was my fault for taking you in twelve years ago."

"What did you do it for? I never really knew."

"To keep you away from the Maneater."

"Away fr— but you kept me right next to him!"

"The last place in the world he'd think of looking."

"You're saying he was looking for me then."

"He's been looking for you ever since you were one year old. And he'll find you. He'll find you, Horty."

"I hope he does," grated Horty. The doorbell rang.

CHAPTER XII

BOBBY DEAR, she wrote, I can't bear to think of you getting letters back with "address unknown" on them. I'm all right. That's first and foremost. I'm all right, monkey-face, and you're not to worry. Your big sister is *all right.*

I'm also all mixed up. Maybe in that nice orderly hospital this will make more sense to you. I'll try to make it short and simple.

I was working one morning at the office when that awful Judge Bluett came in. He had to wait for a few minutes before he could see old Wattles Hartford, and he used it to make his usual wet soggy string of verbal passes. My brush worked fine until the seamy old weasel got on the subject of Daddy's money. You know that we'll get it when I'm 21—unless that old partnership deal comes up again. It would have to go to court. Bluett not only was the partner—he's the Surrogate. Even if we could get him disqualified from hearing the case, you know how he could fix anyone else who might take the bench. Well, the idea was that if I would be nice and sweet to Hizzoner, in any nasty way he wanted, the will wouldn't be contested. I was terribly frightened, Bobby; you know the rest of your training has to come out of that money. I didn't know what to do. I needed time to think. I promised to meet him that night, real late, in a night-club.

Bobby, it was awful. I was just at the point of blowing up, there at the table, when the old drooler left the room for a minute. I didn't know whether to fight or run away. I was scared, believe me. All of a sudden there was somebody standing there talking to me. I think he must be my guardian angel, though he seemed

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to be the guitarist in the band there at the club. Seems he had overheard the Judge talking to me. He wanted me to cut and run. I was afraid of him, too, at first, and then I saw his face. Oh, Bobby, it was such a *nice* face! He wanted to give me some money, and before I could say no he told me I could return it whenever I wanted to. He told me to get out of town right now—take a train, any train; he didn't even want to know which one. And before I could stop him he shoved $300 into my bag and went back to the bandstand. The last thing he said was to accept a date for the next evening with the Judge. I couldn't do a thing—he'd only been there two minutes and he was talking practically every second of it. And then the Judge came back. I flapped my eyelids at the old fool like a lost woman, and cut out. I got a train to Eltonville twenty minutes later and didn't even register in a hotel when I got here. I waited around until the stores opened and bought an overnight case and a tooth brush and got myself a room. I slept a few hours and the very same afternoon I had a job in the only record shop in the place. It's $26 a week but I can make it fine.

Meanwhile I don't know what's happening back home. I got the idea that guitar fellow would take care of the Judge one way or another. I'm sort of holding my breath until I hear something. I'm going to wait, though. We have time, and in the meantime, I'm all right. I'm not going to give you my address, honey, though I'll write often. Judge Bluett just might be able to get his hands on mail, some way. I think it pays to be careful. He's dangerous.

The only move I've made is a wild one. Did you ever have a real plooper of an idea and couldn't get it out of your head? This was one. Of course I did a lot of thinking about this fellow with the guitar. Now, maybe my wires are crossed, but every time I thought of him I thought of a kid called Horty—Horty *Bluett.* You were about six at the time, Bob. Maybe you don't remember about Horty. He was a funny kid. Quiet, sort of. He got expelled from school for something fantastic—eating bugs, I think. Anyway there was a terrible mess when he got home, and Judge Bluett—though he wasn't a judge then—beat him terribly. The boy was only about seven years old at the time. I saw him that evening, out at the stoplight on the Endton turnpike where we used to live. He talked to me a minute and then I had to go in. I peeped out the window after I was inside and saw him climb on the back of a truck. It was painted red and gold and had "Monetre's Mammoth Showland" written on the side. I'll never forget it. It was one of those mental pictures that stays with you.

But I kept thinking about Horty, here in Eltonville. The other morning I was going to work and saw the same red-and-gold business on a poster. A carnival, and it was only thirty miles from here. I suddenly got the wild idea of going there and seeing whoever ran the place, to find out if I could get a line on that Horty. See, he was Armand Bluett's adopted kid, and if anyone on earth hates the Judge, that boy does, if he's alive to do it. If I could find him, I just might get something on the Judge and wall him off from Daddy's money with something besides my little white body. I know it sounds crazy, but it just might work.

As carnivals go, this one was real flossy. The boss lived in a big streamlined silver trailer. Bobby, I wish you could see him, just to be able to

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say you'd had the experience. I can't say just what it is that's wrong with him, but he's completely inhuman. Unhuman would be more like it. Every time he spoke to me it was in a different voice. I couldn't dig him at all. But he gave me the creeps. Not the kind of creeps the Judge gives me, either. Anyway, I drew a real blank. Not only had he never heard of Horty, but he got sore when I mentioned in passing that you were studying to be a doctor. Seems he's psyched about doctors. He practically threw me out. Crazy as a quilt. Probably works in his own freak show in his spare time.

So, honey, that's the situation as far as it's gone. Going to the carnival was the only thing I could think of to do and I've done that. What next? I'll watch the home town papers for any item about His Dishonor the Surrogate, and hope for the best. As for you, don't worry your little square head about me, darling. I'm doing fine. I'm only making a few dollars a week less than I was at home and I'm a lot safer here. And the work isn't hard; some of the nicest people like music. I'm sorry I can't give you my exact address, but I do think it's better not to just now. We can let this thing ride for a year if we have to, and small loss. Work hard, baby; I'm behind you a thousand percent. I'll write often.

XXX Your loving
Big Sis Kay.

(This is the letter that Armand Bluett's hired second-story man found in Undergraduate Robert Hallowell's room at the State Medical School.)

CHAPTER XIII

THERE WAS a frozen silence. It rang again.

"I'll go," said Zena, rising.

"You will like hell," said Horty roughly. "Sit down."

"It's the Maneater," she whimpered. She sat down.

Horty stood where he could look through the living room at the front door. Studying it, he said, "It isn't. It's—it's—well, what do you know! Old Home Week!"

He strode out and flung the door open. "Bunny!"

"Wh-Excuse m—is this where..." Bunny hadn't changed much. She was a shade more roly-poly, and perhaps a little more timid.

"Oh, Bunny..." Zena came running unevenly out, tripped on the hem of the bathrobe. Horty caught her before she could fall. The girls hugged each other frantically, shouting tearful endearments over the rich sound of Horty's relieved laughter. "But darling, how did you find—" "It's so good to—" "I thought you were—" "You doll! I never thought I'd—"

"*Cut!*" roared Horty. "Bunny, come in and have some breakfast."

Startled, she looked at him, her albino eyes round. Gently he asked, "How's Havana?"

Without taking her eyes off his face, Bunny fumbled for Zena and held on. "Does he know Havana?"

"Honey," said Zena, "That's *Horty!*"

Bunny shot Zena a rabbit-like glance, craned to peer behind Horty, and suddenly seemed to realize just what Zena had said. "That?" she demanded, pointing. "Him?" She stared. "He's—Kiddo, too?"

Horty grinned. "That's right."

"He grew," said Bunny inanely. Zena and Horty bellowed with laughter, and, as Horty had done once so long ago, so Bunny gaped from one to the other, sensed that they were laughing with and not at

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her, and joined her tinkling giggle to the noise. Still laughing, Horty went into the kitchen and called out, "You still take canned milk and half a teaspoon of sugar, Bunny?" and Bunny began to cry. Into Zena's shoulder she sobbed happily. "It is Kiddo, it is, it is..."

Horty put the steaming cup on the end table and settled down beside the girls. "Bunny, how in time did you find me?"

"I didn't find you. I found Zee. Zee, Havana's goin' to die."

"I—remember," Zee whispered. "Are you sure?"

"The Maneater did what he could. He even called in another doctor."

"He *did?* Since when has he taken to doctors?"

Bunny sipped her coffee. "You just can't know how he's changed, Zee. I couldn't believe it myself until he did that, called a doctor in, I mean. You know about m-me and Havana. You know how I feel about what the Maneater did to him. But—it's as if he had come up from under a cloud that he's lived with for years. He's really changed. Zee, he wants you to come back. He's *so* sorry about what happened. He's really broken up."

"Not enough," muttered Horty.

"Does he want Horty to come back too?"

"Horty—oh, Kiddo." Bunny looked at him. "He couldn't do an act now. I don't know, Zee. He didn't say."

HORTY NOTICED the swift, puzzled frown on Zena's brow. She took Bunny's upper arm and seemed to squeeze it impatiently. "Honey—start from the beginning. Did the Maneater send you?"

"Oh no. Well, not exactly. He's changed so, Zee. You don't believe me... Well, you'll see for yourself. He needs you and I came to get you back, all by myself."

"Why?"

"Because of Havana!" Bunny cried. "The Maneater might be able to save him, don't you see? But not when he's all torn apart by what he did to you."

Zena turned a troubled face to Horty. He rose. "I'll fix you a bite to eat, Bunny," he said. A slight sidewise movement of his head beckoned to Zena; she acknowledged it with an eyelid and turned back to Bunny. "But how did you know where I was, honey?"

The albino leaned forward and touched Zena's cheek. "You poor darling. Does it hurt much?"

Horty, in the kitchen, called, "Zee! What did you do with the tabasco?"

"Be right back, Bun," said Zee. She hobbled across to the kitchen. "It should be right there on the... yes. Oh—you haven't started the toast! I'll do it, Horty."

They stood side by side at the stove, busily. Under his breath Horty said "I don't like it, Zee."

She nodded. "There's something... we've asked her twice, three times, how she found this place, and she hasn't said." She added clearly, "See? *That's* the way to make toast. Only you have to watch it."

A moment later, "Horty. How did you know who it was at the door?"

"I didn't. Not really. I knew who it *wasn't*. I know hundreds of people, and I knew it wasn't any of them." He shrugged. "That left Bunny. You see?"

"I can't do that. Nobody I know can do that. 'Cept maybe the Maneater." She went to the sink and clattered briskly. "Can't you tell what people are thinking?" she whispered when she came close to him again.

"Sometimes, a little. I never tried, much."

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"Try now," she said, nodding toward the living room.

His face took on that unruffled, deeply occupied expression. At the same moment there was a flash of movement past the open kitchen door. Horty, who had his back to it, turned and sprang through into the living room. "Bunny!"

Bunny's pink lips curled back from her teeth like an animal's and she scuttled to the front door, whipped it open and was gone. Zena screamed. "My purse! She's got my purse!"

In two huge bounds Horty was in the hall. He pounced on Bunny at the head of the stairs. She squealed and sank her teeth into his hand Horty clamped her head under his arm, jamming her chin against his chest. Having taken a bite, she was forced to keep it—and meanwhile was efficiently gagged.

Inside, he kicked the door closed and pitched Bunny to the couch like a sack of sawdust. Her jaw did not relax; he had to lean over her and pry them apart. She lay with her eyes red and glittering, and blood on her mouth.

"Now, what do you suppose made her go off like that?" he asked, almost casually.

Zena knelt by Bunny and touched her forehead. "Bunny. Bunny, are you all right?"

No answer. She seemed conscious. She kept her mad ruby eyes fixed on Horty. Her breath came in regular, powerful pulses like those of a slow freight. Her mouth was rigidly agape. "I didn't do anything to her," said Horty. "Just picked her up."

ZENA RESCUED her handbag from the floor and fumbled through it. Seemingly satisfied, she set it down on the coffee table. "Horty, what did you do in the kitchen just now?"

"I—sort of..." He frowned. "I thought of her face, and I made it kind of open like a door, or—well, blow away like fog, so I could see inside. I didn't see anything."

"Nothing at all?"

"She moved," he said simply.

Zena began to knead her hands together. "Try it again."

Horty went to the couch. Bunny's eyes followed him. Horty folded his arms. His face relaxed. Bunny's eyes closed immediately. Her jaw slackened. Zena barked, "Horty—be careful!"

Without moving otherwise, Horty nodded briefly.

For a moment nothing happened. Then Bunny trembled. She threw out an arm, clenched her small hand. Tears stole from under her lids, and she relaxed. In a few seconds she began to move vaguely, purposely, as if unfamiliar hands tested her motor centers. Twice she opened her eyes; once she half sat up, and then lay back. At last she released a long, shuddering sigh, pitched almost as low as Zena's voice, and lay still, breathing deeply.

"She's asleep," said Horty. "She fought me, but now she's asleep." He fell into a chair and covered his face for a moment. Zena watched him restore himself as he had restored his whitened arm earlier. He sat up briskly and said, his voice strong again, "It was more than her strength, Zee. She was full to the brim with something that wasn't hers."

"Is it all gone now?"

"Sure. Wake her and see."

"You've never done anything like this before, Horty? You seem as sure of yourself as old Iwazian." Iwazian was the carnival's photo-gallery operator. He had only to take a picture to know how good it was; he never looked at a proof.

"You keep saying things like that,"

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said Horty with a trace of impatience. "There are things a man can do and things he can't. When he does something, what's the point of wondering whether or not he's actually done it? Don't you think he knows?"

"I'm sorry, Horty. I keep underestimating you." She sat beside the albino midget. "Bunny," she cooed. "Bunny..."

Bunny turned her head, turned it back, opened her eyes. They seemed vague, unfocussed. She turned them on Zena, and recognition crept into them. She looked around the room, cried out in fear. Zena held her close. "It's all right, darling," she said. "That's Kiddo, and I'm here, and you're all right now."

"But how—where—"

"Shh. Tell us what's happened. You remember the carnival? Havana?"

"Havana's goin' to die."

"We'll try to help, Bunny. Do you remember coming here?"

"Here." She looked around, as if one part of her mind were trying to catch up with the rest. "The Maneater told me to. He was nothing but eyes. After a while I couldn't even see his eyes. His voice was inside my head. "I don't remember," she said piteously. "Havana's going to die." She said this as if it were the first time.

"We'd better not ask her questions now," said Zena.

"Wrong," said Horty. "We'd better, and fast." He bent over Bunny. "How did you find this place?"

"I don't remember."

"After the Maneater talked inside your head, what did you do?"

"I was on a train." Her answers were almost vague; she did not seem to be withholding information—rather, she seemed unable to extend it. It had to be lifted out.

"Where did you go when you got off the train?"

"A bar. Uh—Club... Nemo. I asked the man where I could find the guitar player who hurt his hand."

Zena and Horty exchanged a look. "The Maneater said Zena would be with the guitar player."

"Did he say the guitar player was Kiddo? Or Horty?"

"No. He didn't say. I'm hungry."

"All right, Bunny. We'll get you a big breakfast in a minute. What were you supposed to do when you found Zena? Bring her back?"

"No. The jewels. She had the jewels. There had to be two of them. He'd give me twice what he gave Zena if I came back without them. But he'd kill me if I came with only one."

"How he's changed," Zena said, scornful horror in her voice.

"How did he know where I was?" Horty demanded.

"I don't know. Oh; that girl."

"What girl?"

"She's a blonde girl. She wrote a letter to someone. Her brother. A man got the letter."

"What man?"

"Blue. Judge Blue."

"Bluett?"

"Yes, Judge Bluett. He got the letter and it said the girl was working in a record shop in town. There was only one record shop. They found her easily."

"*They found her?* Who?"

"The Maneater. And that Blue. Bluett."

Horty brought his fists together. "Where is she?"

"The Maneater's got her at the carnival. Can I have my breakfast now?"

CHAPTER XIV

HORTY LEFT.

He slipped into a light coat

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and found his wallet and keys, and he left. Zena screamed at him. Intensity injected raucousness into her velvet voice. She caught his arm; he did not shake her off, but simply kept moving, dragging her as if she were smoke in the suction of his movement. She turned to the table, snatched up her bag, found two glittering jewels. "Horty, wait, wait!" She held out the jewels. "Don't you remember, Horty?—Junky's eyes, the jewels—they're *you*, Horty!"

He said, "If you need anything at all, no matter what, call Nick at Club Nemo. He's all right," and opened the door.

She hobbled after him, caught at his coat, missed her hold, staggered against the wall. "Wait, wait. I have to tell you, you're not ready; you just don't *know!*" She sobbed. "Horty, the Maneater—"

Halfway down the stairs he turned. "Take care of Bunny, Zee. Don't go out, not for anything. I'll be back soon."

And he left.

Holding the wall, Zena crept down the hall and into the apartment. Bunny sat on the couch, sobbing with fright but she stopped when she saw Zena's twisted face, and ran to her. She helped her to the easy-chair and crouched on the floor at her feet, hugging her legs, her round chin against Zena's knees. The vibrant color was gone from Zena; she stared dryly down, black eyes in a grey face.

The jewels fell from her hand and glittered on the rug. Bunny picked them up. They were warm, probably from Zena's hand. But the little hand was so cold... They were hard, but Bunny felt that if she squeezed them hard they would be soft. She put them on Zena's lap. She said nothing. She knew, somehow, that this was not the time to say anything.

Zena said something. It was unintelligible; her voice was a hoarseness, nothing more. Bunny made a small interrogative sound, and Zena cleared her throat and said, "Fifteen years."

Bunny waited quietly after that, for minutes, wondering why Zena did not blink her eyes. Surely that must hurt her...she reached up presently and touched the lids. Zena blinked and stirred uneasily. "Fifteen years I've been trying to stop this from happening. I knew what he was the instant I saw those jewels. Maybe even before...but I was sure when I saw the jewels." She closed her eyes; it seemed to give more vitality to her voice, as if her intense gaze had been draining her. "I was the only one who knew. The Maneater only hoped. Even Horty didn't know. Only me. Only me. Fifteen years—"

Bunny stroked her knee. A long time passed. She became certain that Zena was asleep, and had begun to think thoughts of her own when the deep, tired voice came again.

"They're alive." Bunny looked up; Zena's hand was over the jewels. "They think and they speak. They mate. They're alive. These two are Horty."

SHE SAT up and pushed her hair back. "That's how I knew. We were in that diner, the night we found Horty. A man was robbing our truck, remember? The man put his knee on these crystals, and Horty got sick. He was indoors and a long way from the truck but he knew. Bunny, do you remember?"

"Mm-hm. Havana, he used to talk about it. Not to you, though. We always knew when you didn't want to talk, Zee."

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"I do now," said Zena wearily. She wet her lips. "How long have you been with the show, Bun?"

"I guess eighteen years."

"Twenty for me. Almost that, anyway. I was with Kwell Brothers when the Maneater bought into it. He had a menagerie. He had Gogol and a pinhead and a two-headed snake and a bald squirrel. He used to do a mind-reading act. Kwell sold out for nothing. Two late springs and a tornado taught Kwell all the carny he ever wanted to know. Lean years. I stuck with the show because I was there, mostly. Just as tough there as anywhere else." She sighed, focussing for twenty years. "The Maneater was obsessed by what he called a hobby. Strange people aren't his hobby. Carny isn't his hobby. Those things are because of his hobby." She lifted the jewels and clicked them together like dice. "These are his hobby. These things make strange people. When he got a new freak—" (The word jolted both of them as she said it)—"he kept it by him. He got into show business so he could keep them and make money too, that's all. He kept them and studied them and made more of them."

"Is that really what makes strange people?"

"No! Not all of them. You know about glands and mutations, and all that. These crystals make them too, that's all. They do it—I *think* they do it—on purpose."

"I don't understand, Zee."

"Bless your heart! Neither do I. Neither does the Maneater, although he knows an awful lot about them. He can talk to them, sort of."

"How?"

"It's like his mind-reading. He puts his mind on them. He—hurts them with his mind until they do what he wants."

"What does he want them to do?"

"Lots of things. They all amount to one thing, though. He wants a—a middleman. He wants them to make something that he can talk to, give orders to. Then the middleman would turn around and make the crystals do what he wanted."

"I guess I'm sort of stupid, Zee."

"No you're not, honey...oh. Bunny, Bunny, I'm so *glad* you're here!" She pulled the albino up into the chair and hugged her fervently. "Let me talk Bun. I've got to talk! Years and years, and I haven't said a word..."

"I won't understand one word in ten, I bet."

"Yes you will, lamb. Comfy? Well ...you see, these crystals are a sort of animal, kind of. They're not like any other animal that ever lived on earth. I don't think they came from anywhere on earth. The Maneater told me he sees a picture sometimes of white and yellow stars in a black sky, the way space would look away outside the earth. He thinks they drifted here."

"He told you? You mean he talked to you about them?"

"By the hour. I guess everybody has to talk to someone. He talked to me. He threatened to kill me, time and time again, if I ever said a word. But that's not why I kept it a secret. See, he was good to me, Bunny. He's mean and crazy, but he was always good to me."

"I know. We used to wonder."

"I didn't think it made any difference to anyone. Not at first, not for years. When I did learn what he was really trying to do, I *couldn't* tell anyone; no one would've believed me. All I could do was to learn as much as I could and hope I could stop him when the time came."

"Stop him from what, Zee?"

"Well—look; let me tell you a little more about the crystals. Then

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you'll see. These crystals used to *copy* things. I mean, one would be near a flower, and it would make another flower just like it. Or a dog, or a bird. But mostly they didn't come out right. Like Gogol. Like the two-headed snake."

"Gogol is one of those?'

ZENA NODDED. "The Fish-Boy. I think he was supposed to be a human being. No arms no legs, no teeth, and he can't sweat so he has to be kept in a tank or he'll die."

"But what do the crystals do that for?"

She shook her head. "That's one of the things the Maneater was trying to find out. There isn't anything regular about the things the crystals make, Bunny. I mean, one will look like the real thing and another will come up all strange, and another won't live at all, it's such a botch. That's why he wanted a middle-man —someone who could communicate with the crystals. He couldn't, except in flashes. He could no more understand them than you or I could understand advanced chemistry or radar or something. But one thing did not come clear. There are different kinds of crystals; some are more complicated than others, and can do more. Maybe they're all the same kind, but some are older. They never helped each other; didn't seem to have anything to do with each other.

"But they bred. The Maneater didn't know that for a long time. He knew that sometimes a pair of crystals would sometimes stop responding when he hurt them. At first he thought they were dead. He dissected one pair. And once he gave a couple to old Worble."

"I remember him! He used to be a strong man, but he was too old. He used to help the cook, and all. He died."

"Died—that's one way to say it. Remember the things he used to whittle?"

"Oh, yes—dolls and toys and all like that."

"That's right. He made a jack-in-the-box and used these for eyes." She tossed the crystals and caught them. "He was always giving things away to kids. He was a good old man. I know what happened to that Jack-in-the-box. The Maneater never found out, but Horty told me. Somehow or other it passed from hand to hand and got into an orphanage. That's where Horty was, when he was a tiny baby. Inside of six months they were a part of Horty—or he was a part of them."

"But what about Worble?"

"Oh, maybe a year later the Maneater found out that the crystals bred, and what happened when they did. One pair made a dog; another a white rat. He realized that he had given away two big, well-developed crystals that weren't dead after all. When Worble told him he had put them in toys he made and some kid had them, he didn't know where, why, the Maneater hit him. Knocked him down. Old Worble never woke up again though it was two weeks before he died. No one knew about it but me. It was out behind the cook-tent. I saw."

"I never knew," breathed Bunny, her ruby eyes wide.

"No one did," Zena repeated. "Let's have some coffee—why, *honey!* You never did get your breakfast, you poor baby!"

"Oh gosh" said Bunny "that's all right. Go on talking."

"Come into the kitchen," she said as she rose stiffly. "No; don't be surprised when the Maneater seems to be inhuman. He—*isn't* human."

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"What is he, then?"

"I'll get to it. About the crystals; the Maneater says that the closest you can come to the way they make things—plants and animals, and so on, is to say they *dream* them. You dream sometimes. You know how the things in your dreams are sometimes sharp and clear, and sometimes fuzzy or crooked or out of proportion?"

"Yup. Where's the eggs?"

"Here, dear. Well, the crystals dream sometimes. When they dream sharp and clear they make good plants, and real rats and spiders and birds. They usually don't, though. Not when it's only one crystal that's dreaming. The Maneater says they're erotic dreams."

"What d'ye mean?"

"They dream when they're ready to mate. But some are too—young, or undeveloped, and maybe some just don't find the right mate at that time. But when they dream that way, they change molecules in a plant and make it like another plant, or change a pile of mold into a bird...no one can say what they'll choose to make, or why."

"But—why should they make things so they can mate?"

"The Maneater doesn't think they do it so they can mate, exactly," said Zena, her voice patient. She skillfully flipped an egg in the pan. "He calls it a by-product. It's as if you were in love and you were thinking of nothing but the one you love, and you made a song. Maybe the song wouldn't be about your lover at all. Maybe it'd be about a brook, or a flower, or something. The wind. Maybe it wouldn't be a whole song, even. That song would be a by-product. See?"

"Oh. And the single crystals make things—even complete things—like Tin Pan Alley makes songs."

"Something like it." Zena smiled. It was the first smile in a long while. "Sit down, honey; I'll bring the toast. Now, when two crystals mate, something different happens. They make a whole thing. But they don't make it from just anything the way the single crystals do. First they seem to die together. For weeks they lie like that. The Maneater says there's something between them as strong as atomic binding force—but it can't be felt or measured. After that they begin a together-dream. They find something near them that's alive, and they make it over. He says they replace it, cell by cell. You can't see the change going on in the thing they're replacing. It might be a dog; the dog will keep on eating and running around; it will howl at the moon and chase cats. But one day—I don't know how long it takes—it will be completely replaced, every bit of it."

"Then what?"

"Then it can change itself—if it ever thinks of changing itself. It can be almost anything if it wants to be."

BUNNY stopped chewing, thought, swallowed, and asked, "Change how?"

"Oh, it could get bigger or smaller. Grow more limbs. Go into a funny shape—thin and flat, or round like a ball. If it's hurt it can grow new limbs. And it could do things with thought that we can't even imagine. Bunny, did you ever read about werewolves?"

"Those nasty things that changes from wolves to men and back again?"

Zena sipped coffee. "Mmm. Well, those are mostly legends, but they could have started when someone saw a change like that."

"You mean these crystal-things aren't new on earth?"

"Oh, heavens no! The Maneater

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says they're arriving and living and breeding and dying here all the time."

"Just to make strange people and werewolves," breathed Bunny in wonder.

"No, darling! Making those things is nothing to them! They live a life of their own. Even the Maneater doesn't know what they do, what they think about. The things they make are absent-minded things, like doodles on a piece of paper that you throw away. But the Maneater thinks he could understand them if he could get that middleman."

"What's he want to understand a crazy-thing like that for?"

Zena's small face darkened. "When I found that out, I began listening carefully—and hoping that some day I could stop him. Bunny, the Maneater hates people. He hates and despises all people."

"Oh, yes," said Bunny.

"Even now, with the poor control he has over the crystals, he's managed to make some of them do what he wants. Bunny, he's planted crystals in swampland with malaria mosquito eggs all around them. He's picked up poisonous coral snakes in Florida and planted them in Southern California. Things like that. It's one of the reasons he keeps the carnival. It covers the country, the same route year after year. He goes back and back, finding the crystals he's planted, seeing how much harm they've done to people. He keeps finding more. They look like pebbles or clods until they're cleaned."

"Oh, how—how awful!" Tears brightened Bunny's eyes. "He ought to be—killed!"

"I don't know if he can be killed."

"You mean he's one of those things from the two crystals?"

"Do you think a human being could do what he does?"

"But—what would he do if he got that middleman?"

"He'd train him up. Those creatures that are made by two crystals, they're whatever they think they are. The Maneater would tell the middleman that he was a servant; he was under orders. The middleman would believe him, and think that of himself. Through him the Maneater would have real power over the crystals. He could probably even make them mate, and dream-together any horrible thing he wanted. He could spread disease and plant-blight and poison until there wouldn't be a human being left on earth! And the worst thing about it is that the crystals don't even seem to want that! They're satisfied to go on as they are, making a flower or a cat once in a while, and thinking their own thoughts, and living whatever strange sort of life they live. They aren't after people! They just don't *care*."

"Oh, Zee! And you've been carrying all this around with you for years!" Bunny ran around the table and kissed her. "Oh, baby, why didn't you tell someone?"

"I didn't dare, sweetheart. They would think I was out of my mind. And besides—there's Horty."

"What about Horty?"

"HORTY WAS a baby in an orphanage when, somehow, that toy with the crystal eyes was brought in. The crystals picked on him. It all fits. He told me that when the jack-in-the-box—he called it Junky—was taken away from him, he almost died. The doctors there thought it was some kind of psychosis. It wasn't, of course; the child was in some strange bondage to the married crystals and could not exist away from them. It seems that it was

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far simpler to leave the toy with the child—it was an ugly toy, Horty tells me—than to try to cure the psychosis. In any case, Junky went along with Horty when he was adopted—by that Armand Bluett, incidentally; that judge."

"He's awful! He looks all soft and —and *wet*."

"The Maneater has been looking for one of those twin-crystal creatures for twenty years or more. He's never found one. He had a couple, but animals, not people. Maybe he had passed right by some without recognizing it. He can find crystals pretty easily, you know; he gets other crystals to help him. That's why he walks in the woods and goes out in swamps and grassland so much. When he finds anything a crystal might have made, he brings it in and tests it. He can tell by its cell structure whether it came from a crystal. Blood, too. Then he works on it with his mind. He is sure that if it's a twin-crystal product, he'll know. For one thing, it'd be low on formic acid. It might be anything—an insect or a fish or a tree. He'd give everything he owns in the world for Horty—a human. Not a human; Horty isn't human and hasn't been since he was a year old. But you know what I mean."

"And that would be his middleman?"

"That's right. So when I saw what Horty was, I jumped at the chance to hide him in the last place in the world Pierre Monetre would think of looking—right under his nose."

"Oh, Zee! What a terrible chance to take! He was bound to find out!"

"It wasn't too much of a chance. The Maneater can't read my mind. He can prod it; he can call me in a strange way; but he can't find out what's in it. Not the way Horty did on you before. The Maneater hypnotized you to make you steal the jewels and bring them back. Horty went right into your mind and cleared all that away."

"I—I remember. It was crazy."

"I kept Horty by me and worked on him constantly. I read everything I could get my hands on and fed it to him. Everything, Bunny—comparative anatomy and history and music and mathematics and chemistry—everything I could think of that would help him to a knowledge of human things. There's an old Latin saying, Bunny: *Cogito ergo sum*—'I think, therefore I am.' Horty is the essence of that saying. When he was a midget he believed he was a midget. He didn't grow. He never thought of his voice changing. He never thought of applying what he learned to himself; he let me make all his decisions for him. He digested everything he learned in a reservoir with no outlet, and it never touched him until he decided himself that it was time to use it. He has eidetic memory, you know."

"What's that?"

"Camera memory. He remembers perfectly everything he has seen or read or heard. When his fingers began to grow back—they were smashed hopelesly, you know—I kept it a secret. That was the one thing that would have told the Maneater what Horty was. Humans can't regenerate fingers. Single-crystal creatures can't either. The Maneater used to spend hours in the dark, in the menagerie tent, trying to force the bald squirrel to grow hair, or trying to put gills on Gogol the Fish Boy, by prodding at them with his mind. If any of them had been twin-crystal creatures, they would have repaired themselves."

"I think I see. And what you were

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doing was to convince Horty that he was human?"

"THAT'S RIGHT. He had to identify himself first and foremost with humanity. I taught him guitar for that reason, after his fingers grew back, so that he could learn music quickly and thoroughly. You can learn more music theory in a year on guitar than you can in three on a piano, and music is one of the most human of human things. . He trusted me completely because I never let him think for himself."

"I—never heard you talk like this before, Zee. Like out of books."

"I've been playing a part too, sweet," said Zena gently. "First, I had to keep Horty hidden until he had learned everything I could teach him. Then I had to plan some way to make him stop the Maneater, without danger of the Maneater's making a servant of him."

"How could he do that?"

"I think the Maneater is a single-crystal Thing. I think if Horty could only learn to use that mental whip that the Maneater has, he could destroy him with it. If I should kill the Maneater with a bullet, it won't kill his crystal. Maybe that crystal will mate, later, and produce him all over again—with all the power that a twin-crystal creature has."

"Zee, how do you know the Maneater isn't a twin-crystal thing?"

"I don't," Zee said bleakly. "If that's the case, then I can only pray that Horty's estimate of himself as a human being is strong enough to fight what the Maneater wants to make of him. Hating Armand Bluett is a human thing. Loving Kay Hallowell is another. Those are two things that I needled him with, drilled into him, teased him about, until they became part of his blood and bone."

Bunny was silent before this bitter flood of words. She knew that, in her asexual midget's way, Zena loved Horty; that she was enough of a woman to feel Kay Hallowell's advent as a deep menace to her; that she had fought and won against the temptation to steer Horty away from Kay; and that, more than anything else, she was face to face with terror and remorse now that her long campaign had come to a head.

She watched Zena's proud, battered face, the lips which drooped slightly on one side, the painfully canted head, the shoulders squared under the voluminous robe, and she knew that here was a picture she would never forget. Humanity is a concept close to the abnormals, who are wistfully near it, who state their membership with aberrated breath, who never cease to stretch their stunted arms toward it. Bunny's mind struck a medallion of this torn and courageous figure—a token and a tribute.

Their eyes met, and slowly Zena smiled. "Hi, Bunny. . ."

Bunny opened her mouth and coughed, or sobbed. She put her arms around Zena and snuggled her chin into the cool hollow of the dark-skinned neck. She closed her eyes tight to squeeze away tears. When she opened them she could see again.

She saw, over Zena's, shoulder through the kitchen door, out in the living room, a huge, gaunt figure. Its lower lip swung loosely as it bent over the coffee table. Its exquisite hands plucked up one, two jewels. It straightened, sent her a look of dull pity from its sage-green face, and went silently out.

"Bunny, darling, you're hurting me."

Those jewels are Horty, Bunny thought. *Now I'll tell her Solum has taken them back to the Maneater.*

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Her face and her voice were as dry and as white as chalk as she said, "You haven't been hurt yet..."

CHAPTER XV

HORTY POUNDED up the stairs and burst into his apartment. "I'm walking under water," he gasped. "Every damn thing I reached for is snatched away from me. Everything I do, everywhere I go, it's too early or too late or—" Then he saw Zena on the easy-chair, her eyes open and staring, and Bunny crouched at her feet. "What's the matter here?"

Bunny said, "Solum came in when we were in the kitchen and took the jewels and we couldn't do anything and Zena hasn't said a word since and I'm scared and I don't know what to do—hoo..." and she began to cry.

"Oh Lord." He was across the room in two strides. He lifted Bunny up and hugged her briefly and set her down. He knelt beside Zena. "Zee—"

She did not move. Her eyes were all pupil, windows to a too-dark night. He tilted her chin up and fixed his gaze on her. She trembled and then cried out as if he had burned her, twisted into his arms. "Don't, don't...."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Zee. I didn't know it would hurt you."

She leaned back and looked up at him, seeing him at last. "Horty you're all right..."

"Well, sure. What's this about Solum?"

"He got the crystals. Junky's eyes."

Bunny whispered, "For twelve years she's been keeping them away from the Maneater, Horty; and now—"

"You think the Maneater sent him for them?"

"Must have. I guess he must have followed me, and waited until he saw you leave. He was in here and out again before we could do so much as turn and look."

"Junky's eyes..." There was the time he had almost died, as a child, when Armand threw the toy away. And the time when the tramp had crushed them under his knee, and Horty, in the lunch room two hundred feet away, had felt it. Now the Maneater might...oh, no. This was too much.

Bunny suddenly clapped her hand to her mouth. "Horty—I just thought—the Maneater wouldn't've sent Solum by himself. He wanted those jewels..you know how he gets when he wants something. He can't bear to wait. He must be in town right now!"

"No." Zena rose stiffly. "No, Bun. Unless I'm quite wrong, he was here and is on his way back to the carnival. If he thinks Kay Hallowell is Horty, he'll want to have the jewels where he can work on them and watch her at the same time. I'll bet he's burning up the road back to the carnival this minute."

Horty moaned. "If only I hadn't gone out! I might've been able to stop Solum, maybe even get to the Maneater and— Damn it! Nick's car was in the garage; first I had to find Nick and borrow it, and then I had to get a parked truck out from in front of the garage, and then there was no water in the radiator, and—oh, you know. Anyway, I have the car now. It's downstairs. I'm going to take off right now. In three hundred miles I ought to be able to catch up with...how long ago was Solum here?"

"An hour or so. You just can't, Horty. And what will happen to you when he goes to work on those

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jewels, I hate to think."

Horty took out keys, tossed and caught them. "Maybe," he said suddenly, "Just maybe we can—" He dove for the phone.

Listening to him talk rapidly into the instrument, Zena turned to Bunny. "A plane. But of course!"

Horty put the phone down, looking at his watch. "If I can get out to the airport in twelve minutes I can get a feeder flight."

"You mean 'we'."

"You're not coming. This is my party, from here on out. You kids have been through enough."

Bunny was pulling on her light coat. "I'm going back to Havana," she said grimly, and for all her baby features, her face showed case-hardened purpose.

"You're not going to leave me here," said Zena flatly. She went for her coat. "Don't argue with me, Horty. I have a lot to tell you, and maybe a lot to do."

"But—"

"I think she's right," said Bunny. "She has a lot to tell you."

THE PLANE was wobbling out to the runway when they arrived. Horty drove right out onto the tarmac, horn blasting, and it waited. And after they were settled in their seats, Zena talked steadily. They were ten minutes away from their destination when she was finished.

After a long, thoughtful pause, Horty said, "So that's what I am."

"It's a big thing to be," said Zena.

"Why didn't you tell me all this years ago?"

"Because there were too many things I didn't know. There still are... I didn't know how much the Maneater might be able to dig out of your mind if he tried; I didn't know how deep your convictions on yourself had to go before they settled. All I tried to do was to have you accept, without question, that you were a human being, a part of humanity, and grow up according to that idea."

He turned on her suddenly. "Why did I eat ants?"

She shrugged. "I don't know. Perhaps even two crystals can't do a perfect job. Anyways your formic acid balance was out of adjustment. (Did you know the French word for 'ant' is *fourmi?* They're full of the stuff.) Some kids eat plaster because they need calcium. Some like burned cake for the carbon. If you had an imbalance, you can bet it would be an important one."

The flaps went down; they felt the braking effect. "We're coming in. How far is the carnival from here?"

"About four miles. We can get a cab."

"Zee, I'm going to leave you outside the grounds somewhere. You've been through too much."

"I'm going in with you," said Bunny firmly. "But Zee— I think he's right. Please stay outside until—until it's over."

"What are you going to do?"

He spread his hands. "Whatever I can. Get Kay out of there. Stop Armand Bluett from whatever filthy thing he plans to do with her and her inheritance. And the Maneater.. I don't know, Zee. I'll just have to play it as it comes. But *I* have to do it. You've done all you can. Let's face it; you're not fast on your feet just now. I'd have to keep looking out for you."

"He's right, Zee. Please—" said Bunny.

"Oh, be careful, Horty—*please* be careful!"

No bad dream can top this, Kay thought. Locked in a trailer with a

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frightened wolf and a dying midget, with a madman and a freak due back any minute. Wild talk about missing fingers, about living jewels, and about—wildest of all—Kay not being Kay, but someone or something else.

Havana moaned. She wrung out a cloth and sponged his head again. Again she saw his lips tremble and move, but words stuck in his throat, gurgled and fainted there. "He wants something," she said. "Oh, I wish I knew what he wanted! I wish I knew, and could get it quickly..."

Armand Bluett leaned against the wall by the window, one sack-suited elbow thrust through it. Kay knew he was uncomfortable there and that, probably, his feet hurt. But he wouldn't sit down. He wouldn't get away from the window. Oh no. He might want to yell for help. Old Crawly-Fingers was suddenly afraid of her. He still looked at her wet-eyed and drooling, but he was terrified. Well, let it go. No one likes having his identity denied, but in this case it was all right with her. Anything to keep a room's-breadth between her and Armand Bluett.

"I wish you'd leave that little monster alone," he snapped. "He's going to die anyway."

She turned a baleful glance on him and said nothing. The silence stretched, punctuated only by the Judge's painful foot-shifting. Finally he said, "When Mr. Monetre gets back with those crystals, we'll soon find out who you are. And don't tell me again that you don't know what all this is about. *Who was that guitar player?*" he snapped.

She sighed. "I don't know. I wish you'd stop shouting like that. You can't jolt information out of me that I haven't got. And besides, this little fellow's sick."

THE JUDGE snorted, and moved even closer to the window. She had an impulse to go over there and growl at him. He'd probably go right through the wall. But Havana moaned again. "What is it, fellow? What is it?"

Then she stiffened. Deep within her mind she sensed a presence, a concept connected somehow with delicate, sliding music, with a broad pleasant face and a good smile. It was as if a question had been asked of her, to which she answered silently, *I'm here. I'm all right—so far.*

She turned to look at the Judge, to see if he shared the strange experience. He seemed tense. He stood with his elbow on the sill, nervously buffing his nails on his lapel.

And a hand came through the window.

It was a mutilated hand. It rose into the trailer like the seeking head and neck of a waterfowl, passed in over Armand's shoulder and spread itself in front of his face. The thumb and index fingers were intact. The middle finger was clubbed; the other two were mere buttons of scar-tissue.

Armand Bluett's eyebrows were two stretched semi-cricles, bristling over bulging eyes. The eyes were as round as the open mouth. His upper lip turned back and upward, almost covering his nostrils. He made a faint sound, a retch, a screech, and dropped.

The hand disappeared through the window. There were quick footsteps outside, around to the door. A knock. A voice. "Kay. Kay Hallowell. Open up."

Inanely, she quavered, "Wh-who is it?"

"Horty." The doorknob rattled. "Hurry. The Maneater's due back, but quick."

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"Horty. I—the door's locked."

"The key must be in the Judge's pocket. Hurry."

She went with reluctant speed to the prone figure. It lay on its back, the head propped against the wall, the eyes screwed shut in a violent psychic effort to shut out the world. In the left jacket pocket were keys on a ring—and one single. This she took. It worked.

Kay stood blinking at sunlight. "Horty."

"That's right." He came in, touched her arm, grinned. "You shouldn't write letters. Come on, Bunny."

Kay said, "They thought I knew where you were."

"You do." He turned away from her and studied the supine form of Armand Bluett. "What a sight. Something the matter with his stomach?"

Bunny had arrowed to the bunk, knelt beside it. "Havana... Oh Havana..."

Havana lay stiffly on his back. His eyes were glazed and his lips pouted and dry. Kay said, "Is—is he ... I've done what I could. He wants something. I'm afraid he—" She went to the bedside.

Horty followed. Havana's pale chubby lips slowly relaxed, then pursed themselves. A faint sound escaped. Kay said, "I *wish* I knew what he wants!" Bunny said nothing. She put her hands on the hot cheeks, gently, but as if she would wrest something up out of him by brute force.

Horty frowned. "Maybe I can find out," he said.

Kay saw his face relax, smoothed over by a deep placidity. He bent close to Havana. The silence was so profound, suddenly, that the carnival noises outside seemed to wash in on them, roaring.

The face Horty turned to Kay a moment later was twisted with grief. "I know what he wants. There may not be time before the Maneater gets here... but— There's got to be time," he said decisively. He turned to Kay. "I've got to go to the other end of the trailer. If he moves—" indicating the Judge— "hit him with your shoe. Preferably with a foot in it." He went out, his hand, oddly, on his throat, kneading.

"What's he going to do?"

Bunny, her eyes fixed on Havana's comatose face, answered, "I don't know. Something for Havana. Did you see his face when he went out? I don't think Havana's going to— to—"

From the partition came the sound of a guitar, the six open strings brushed lightly. The A was dropped, raised a fraction. The E was flatted a bit. Then a chord...

SOMEWHERE a girl began to sing to the guitar. "Stardust." The voice was full and clear, a lyric soprano, pure as a boy's voice. Perhaps it was a boy's voice. There was a trace of vibrato at the ends of the phrases. The voice sang to the lyric, just barely trailing the beat, not quite ad lib, not quite stylized, and as free as breathing. The guitar was not played in complicated chords, but mostly in swift and delicate runs in and about the melody.

Havana's eyes were still open, and still he did not move. But his eyes were wet now, and not glazed, and gradually he smiled. Kay knelt beside Bunny. Perhaps she knelt only to be nearer... Havana whispered, through his smile, "Kiddo."

When the song was done, his face relaxed. Quite clearly he said "Hey."

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There was a world of compliment in the single syllable. After that, and before Horty came back, he died.

Entering, Horty did not even glance at the cot. He seemed to be having trouble with his throat. "Come on," he said hoarsely. "We've got to get out of here."

They called Bunny and went to the door. But Bunny stayed by the bunk, her hands on Havana's cheeks, her soft round face set.

"Bunny, come on. If the Maneater comes back—"

There was a step outside, a thump against the wall of the trailer. Kay wheeled and looked at the suddenly darkened window. Solum's great sad face filled it. Just then Horty screamed shrilly and dropped writhing to the floor. Kay turned to face the opening door.

"Good of you to wait," said Pierre Monetre, looking about.

ZENA HUDDLED on the edge of the lumpy motel bed and whimpered. Horty and Bunny had been gone for nearly two hours; for the past hour, depression had grown over her until it was like bitter incense in the air, like clothes of lead sheeting on her battered limbs. Twice she had leapt up and paced impatiently, but her knee hurt her and drove her back to the bed, to punch the pillow impotently, to lie passive and watch the doubts circling endlessly about her. Should she have told Horty about himself? Should she not have given him more cruelty, more ruthlessness, about more things than revenging himself on Armand Bluett? How deep had her training gone in the malleable entity which was Horty? Could not Monetre, with his fierce, directive power undo her twelve years' work in an instant? She knew so little; she was, she felt, so small a thing to have undertaken the manufacture of a—a human being.

She wished, fiercely, that she could burrow her mind into the strange living crystals, as the Maneater tried to do, but completely, so that she could find the rules of the game, the facts about a form of life so alien that logic seemed not to work on it at all. The crystals had a rich vitality; they created, they bred, they felt pain; but to what end did they live? Crush one, and the others seemed not to mind. And why, why did they make these "dream-things" of theirs, laboriously, cell by cell—sometimes to create only a horror, a freak, an unfinished unfunctional monstrosity, sometimes to copy a natural object so perfectly that there was no real distinction between the copy and its original; and sometimes, as in Horty's case, to create something new, something that was not a copy of anything but, perhaps, a mean, a living norm on the surface, and a completely fluid, polymorphic being at its core? What was their connection with these creations? How long did a crystal retain control of its product—and how, having built it, could it abruptly leave it to go its own way? And when the rare syzygy occurred by which two crystals made something like Horty—when would they release him to be his own creature...and what would become of him then?

Perhaps the Maneater had been right when he had described the creatures of the crystals as their dreams—solid figments of their alien imaginations, built any way they might occur, patterned on partial suggestions pictured by faulty memories of real objects. She knew—the Maneater had happily demonstrat-

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ed—that there were thousands perhaps millions of the crystals on earth, living their strange lives, as oblivious to humanity as humanity was to them, for the life-cycles, the purposes and aims of the two species were completely separate. Yet—how many men walked the earth who were not men at all; how many trees, how many rabbits, flowers, amoebae, sea-worms, redwoods, eels and eagles grew and flowered, swam and hunted and stood among their prototypes with none knowing that they were an alien dream, having, apart from the dream, no history?

"Books," Zena snorted. The books she had read! She had snatched everything she could get her hands on that would give her the slightest lead on the nature of the dreaming crystals. And for every drop of information she had gained (and passed on to Horty) about physiology, biology, comparative anatomy, philosophy, history, theosophy and psychology, she had taken in a gallon of smug certitude, of bland assumptions that humanity was the peak of creation. The answers...the books had answers for everything. A new variety of manglewort appears, and some learned pundit places his finger alongside his nose and pronounces, "Mutation!" Sometimes, certainly. But—always? What of the hidden crystal-creature dreaming in a ditch, absently performing, by some strange telekinesis, a miracle of creation?

She loved, she worshipped Charles Fort, who refused to believe that any answer was the only answer.

She looked at her watch yet again, and whimpered. If she only knew; if she could only guide him...if she could get guidance herself, somewhere, somewhere...

THE DOORKNOB turned. Zena froze, staring at it. Something heavy leaned, or pressed against, the door. There was no knock. The crack between door and frame, high up, widened. Then the bolt let go, and Solum burst into the room.

His loose-skinned, grey-green face and dangling lower lip seemed to pull more than usual at the small, inflamed eyes. He took a half-step back to swing the door closed behind him, and crossed the room to her, his great arms away from his body as if to check any move she might make.

His presence told her some terrible news. No one knew where she was but Horty and Bunny, who had left her in this tourist cabin before they crossed the highway to the carnival. And when last heard of, Solum had been on the road with the Maneater.

So—the Maneater was back, and he had contacted Bunny or Horty, or both, and, worst of all, he had been able to extract information that neither would give willingly.

She looked up at him out of a tearing flurry of deadening resignation and mounting terror. "Solum—"

His lips moved. His tongue passed over his brilliant pointed teeth. He reached for her, and she shrank back.

And then he dropped to his knees. Moving slowly, he took her tiny foot in one of his hands, bent over it with an air that was, unmistakably, reverence.

He kissed her instep, ever so gently, and he wept. He released her foot and crouched there, immersed in great noiseless shuddering sobs.

"But, *Solum*—" she said, stupidly. She put out a hand and touched his wet cheek. He pressed it closer. She watched him in utter astonishment. Long ago she used to wonder at what went on in the mind behind this hideous face, a mind locked in a si-

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lent, speechless universe, with all the world pouring in through the observant eyes and never an expression, never a conclusion or an emotion coming out.

"What is it, Solum?" she whispered. "Horty—"

He looked up and nodded rapidly. She stared at him. "Solum—can you hear?"

He seemed to hesitate; then he pointed to his ear, and shook his head. Immediately he pointed to his brow, and nodded.

"Oh-h-h..." Zena breathed. For years there had been idle arguments in the carnival as to whether the Alligator-skinned Man was really deaf. There was instance after instance to prove both that he was, and that he was not. The Maneater knew, but had never told her. He was—telepathic! She flushed as she thought of it, the times that carnies, half-kidding, had hurled insults at him; worse, the horrified reactions of the customers.

"But— "What's happened? Have you seen Horty? Bunny?"

His head bobbed twice.

"Where are they? Are they safe?"

He thumbed toward the carnival, and shook his head gravely.

"Th-the Maneater's got them?"

Yes.

"And the girl?"

Yes.

She hopped off the bed, strode away and back, ignoring the pain. "He sent you here to get me?"

Yes.

"But why don't you scoop me up and take me back, then?"

No answer. He motioned feebly. She said, "Let's see. You took the jewels when he asked you to..."

Solum tapped his forehead, spread his hands. Suddenly she understood. "He hypnotized you then."

Solum nodded vehemently.

"But not this time." She could imagine it; the Maneater, wanting the crystals, plotting carefully; sending Bunny with orders to inquire for the guitarist's address at Club Nemo. And then, as a double check, putting Solum on her trail. He would give hypnotic commands to them both for a job that detailed; but now, busy in—in some fiendish work over Horty, he would extract the information about where she was—most likely from Bunny—and simply snap at Solum— "She's at that motor-court down the road. Go get her!"

"Then you really didn't want to steal the crystals for him."

SOLUM SHRUGGED; she understood that it had been a matter of indifference to him. But this time it was different. Something had happened to change his mind, and drastically.

"Oh, I wish you could talk!"

He made anxious, lateral circular motions with his right hand. "Oh, of *course!*" she exploded. She limped to the splintery bureau and her purse. She found her pen; she had no paper but her checkbook. "Here, Solum. Hurry. Tell me!"

His huge hands enveloped the pen, completely hid the narrow paper. He wrote rapidly while Zena wrung her hands in impatience. At last he handed it to her. His script was delicate, almost microscopic, and as neat as engraving.

He had written, tersely, "M. hates people. Me too. Not so much. M. wants help, I helped him. M. wanted Horty so he could hurt more people. I didn't care. Still helped. People never liked me.

"I am human, a little. Horty is not human at all. But when Havana was dying, he wanted Kiddo to sing.

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Horty read his mind. He knew. There was no time. There was danger. Horty knew. Horty didn't save himself. He made Kiddo's voice. He sang for Havana. Too late then. M. came. Caught him. Horty did this so Havana could die happy. It didn't help Horty. Horty knew; did it anyway. Horty is love. M. is hate. Horty more human than I am. I am ashamed. You made Horty. Now I help you."

Zena read it, her eyes growing very bright. "Havana's dead, then."

Solum made a significant gesture, twisting his head in his hands, pointing to his neck, snapping his fingers loudly. He shook his fist at the carnival.

"Yes. The Maneater killed him. ...How did you know about the song?"

Solum tapped his forehead.

"Oh. You got it from Bunny, and the girl Kay; from their minds."

Zena sat on the bed, pressing her knuckles hard against her cheekbones. Think, think...oh, for guidance; for a word of advice about these alien things! The Maneater, crazed, inhuman; surely a warped crystalline product; there must be some way of stopping him. If only she could contact one of the jewels and ask it what to do...surely it would know. If only she had the "middle-man", the interpreter, that the Maneater had been seeking all these years...

The middleman! "I'm blind, I'm stone blind and stupid!" she gasped. All these years her single purpose had been to keep Horty away from the crystals; he must have nothing to do with them, lest the Maneater use him against humanity. But Horty was what he was; he was the very thing the Maneater wanted; he was the one who could contact the crystals. There must be a way in which the crystals could destroy what they created!

But would the crystals tell him of such a thing?

They wouldn't have to, she decided instantly. All Horty would have to do would be to understand the strange mental mechanism of the crystals, and the method would be clear to him.

If only she could tell him! Horty learned quickly, thought slowly; for eidetic memory is the enemy of methodical thought. Ultimately he would think of this himself—but by then he might be the Maneater's crippled slave. What could she do? Write him a note? He might not even be conscious to read it! If only she were a telepath... Telepath!

"Solum," she said urgently, "Can you—*speak,* up here" (she touched her forehead) as well as hear?"

He shook his head. But at the same time he picked up the check on which he had written and pointed to a word.

"Horty. You can speak to Horty?"

He shook his head, and then made outgoing motions from his brow. "Oh," she said. "You can't project it, but he can read it if he tries." He nodded eagerly.

"Good!" she said. She drew a deep breath; she knew, at last, exactly what she must do. "Take me back there, Solum. You've caught me. I'm frightened, I'm angry. Get to Horty. You can think of a way. Get to him and think *hard.* Think: *Ask the crystals how to kill one of their dream-things. Find out from the crystals.* Got that, Solum?"

THE WALL had gone up years ago, when Horty came to the very simple conclusions that the peremptory summonses which awak-

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ened him at night in his bunk were for Zena, and not for him. *Cogito, ergo sum;* the wall, once erected, stood untended for years, until Zena suggested that he try reaching into the hypnotized Bunny's mind. The wall had come down for that; it was still down when he used his new sense to locate the trailer in which Kay was a prisoner, and when he sought the nature of Havana's dying wish. His sensitive mind was therefore open and unguarded when the Maneater arrived and hurled at him his schooled and vicious lance of hatred. Horty went down in flames of agony.

In ordinary terms, he was completely unconscious. He did not see Solum catch the fainting Kay Hallowell and tuck her under his long arm while his other hand darted out to snatch up soft-faced, tender-hearted Bunny, who fought and spit as she dangled there. He had no memory of being carried to Monetre's big trailer, of the tottering advent, a few minutes later, of a shaken and murderous Armand Bluett. He was not aware of Monetre's quick hypnotic control of hysterical Bunny, nor of her calm flat voice revealing Zena's whereabouts, nor of Monetre's crackling command to Solum to go to the motor court and bring Zena back. He did not hear Monetre's blunt order to Armand Bluett: "I don't think I need you and the girl for anything any more. Stand back there out of the way." He did not see Kay's sudden dash for the door, nor the cruel blow of Armand Bluett's fist which sent her sliding back into the corner as he snarled, "I need *you* for something, sweetheart, and you're not getting out of my sight again."

But the blacking out of the ordinary world revealed another. It was not strange; it had coexisted with the other. Horty saw it now only because the other was taken away.

There was nothing about it to relieve the utter lightlessness of oblivion. In it, Horty was immune to astonishment and quite without curiosity. It was a place of flickering impressions and sensations; of pleasure in an integration of abstract thought, of excitement at the approach of one complexity to another, of engrossing concentration in distant and exoteric constructions. He felt the presence of individuals, very strongly indeed; the liaison between them was non-existent, except for the rare approach of one to another and, somewhere far off, a fused pair which he knew were exceptional. But for these, it was a world of self-developing entities, each evolving richly according to its taste. There was a sense of permanence, of life so long that death was not a factor, save as an aesthetic termination. Here there was no hunger, no hunting, no co-operation, and no fear; these things had nothing to do with the bases of a life like this. Basically trained to accept and to believe in that which surrounded him, Horty delved not at all, made no comparisons, and was neither intrigued nor puzzled.

Presently he sensed the tentative approach of the force which had blasted him, used now as a goad rather than as a spear. He rebuffed it easily, but moved to regain consciousness so that he might deal with the annoyance.

HE OPENED his eyes and found them caught and held by those of Pierre Monetre, who sat at his desk facing him. Horty was sprawled back in an easy-chair, his head propped in the angle of the back and a small rounded wing. The Maneater was radiating nothing. He simply

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watched, and waited.

Horty closed his eyes, sighed, moved his jaws as a man does on awakening.

"Horty." The Maneater's voice was mellow, friendly. "My dear boy. I have looked forward so long to this moment. This is the beginning of great things for us two."

Horty opened his eyes again and looked about. Bluett stood glowering at him, a shuddering mixture of fear and fury. Kay Hallowell huddled in the corner opposite the entrance, on the floor. Bunny squatted next to her, holding limply to Kay's forearm, looking out into the room with vacant eyes.

"Horty," said the Maneater insistently. Horty met his gaze again. Effortlessly he blocked the hypnotic force which the Maneater was exerting. The mellow voice went on, soothingly. "You're home at last, Horty—really home. I am here to help you. You belong here. I understand you. I know the things you want. I will make you happy. I will teach you greatness, Horty. I will protect you, Horty. And you will help me." He smiled. "Won't you, Horty?"

"You can drop dead," said Horty succinctly.

The reaction was instant—a shaft of brutal hatred whetted to a razor-edge, a needle-point. Horty rebuffed it, and waited.

The Maneater's eyes narrowed and his eyebrows went up. "Stronger than I thought. Good. I'd rather have you strong. You *are* going to work with me, you know."

Horty blankly shook his head. Again, and twice more, the Maneater struck at him, timing the pyschic blows irregularly. Had Horty's defense been a counter-act, like that of a rapier or a boxing-glove, the Maneater would have gotten through. But it was a wall.

The Maneater leaned back, consciously relaxing. His weapon apparently took quantities of energy. "Very well," he purred. "We'll dull you down a bit." He drummed his fingers idly.

Long moments passed. For the first time Horty realized that he was bound, his wrists together and pulled down between his thighs by a rope which was secured to the rung and which also snubbed his ankles to the legs of the chair. Kay stirred and was quiet. Bunny looked at her and away, still with that vacant gaping look on her sweet round face. Bluett shifted uncomfortably on his feet.

The door was elbowed aside. Solum came in with Zena in his arms. She was limp. Horty made a move; the rope checked him. The Maneater smiled engagingly and motioned with his head. "Into the corner with the rest of the trash," he said. "We might be able to use her. Think our friend would be more co-operative if we cut her down a bit?"

Solum grinned wolfishly.

"Of course," said the Maneater thoughtfully, "She isn't very big to begin with. We'd have to be careful. A little at a time." Belying his offhand tone, his eyes watched every move of Horty's face. "Solum, old fellow, our boy Horty is a little too alert. Suppose you jolt him a bit. The edge of your hand at the side of his neck, right at the base of the skull. The way I showed you. You know."

Solum stalked over to Horty. He put one hand on Horty's shoulder, and took careful aim with the other. The hand which rested on his shoulder squeezed slightly, over and over again. Solum's eyes burned down to Horty's. Horty watched the Maneater. He knew the major blow would

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come from there.

SOLUM'S other hand came down. A fraction of a second after it hit his neck, Monetre's psychic bolt smashed against Horty's barrier. Horty felt a faint surprise; Solum had pulled the punch. He looked up quickly. Solum, his back turned to the Maneater, touched his forehead, worked his lips anxiously. Horty shrugged this off. He had no time for idle wonderments... he heard Zena whimper.

"You're in my way, Solum!" Solum moved reluctantly. "You'll have another chance at him," said the Maneater. He opened the drawer in front of him and took out two objects. "Horty, d'ye know what these are?"

Horty grunted and nodded. They were Junky's eyes. The Maneater chuckled. "If I smash these, you die. You know that, don't you?"

"Wouldn't be much help to you then, would I?"

"That's right. But I just wanted to let you know I have them handy." Ceremoniously he lighted a small alcohol blow-lamp. "I don't have to destroy them. Single-crystal creatures react beautifully to fire. You should do twice as well." His voice changed abruptly. "Oh, Horty, my boy, my dear boy—don't force me to play with you like this."

"Play away," gritted Horty.

"Hit him again, Solum." Now the voice crackled.

Solum swept down on him. Horty caught a glimpse of Armand's avid face, the flick of a tongue across his wet lips. The blow was heavier this time, though still surprisingly less powerful than he expected—less powerful, for that matter, than it looked. Horty rolled his head with the impact, and slumped down with his eyes closed. The Maneater hurled no bolts this time, apparently in an attempt to force Horty to use up counter-ammunition while saving his own.

"Too hard, you idiot!"

Kay's voice moaned out of the corner, "Oh, stop it, stop it..."

"Ah." The Maneater's chair scraped as he turned. "Miss Hallowell! How much would the young man do for you? Drag her out here, Bluett."

The Judge did. He said, with a leer, "Save some for me, Pierre."

"I'll do as I like!" snapped the Maneater.

"All right, all right," said the Judge, cowed. He went back to his corner.

Kay stood erect but trembling before the desk. "You'll have the police to answer to," she flared.

"The Judge will take care of the police. Sit down, my dear." When she did not move, he roared at her. *"Sit down!"* She gulped and sat in the chair at the end of the long desk. He reached out and trapped her wrist, pulled it toward him. "The Judge tells me you like having your fingers cut off."

"I don't know what you m-mean. Let me g—"

Meanwhile Solum was on his knees beside Horty, rolling his head, slapping his cheeks. Horty submitted patiently, quite conscious. Kay screamed.

"Nice noisy carnival we have here," smiled the Maneater. "That's quite useless, Miss Hallowell." He pulled a heavy pair of shears out of the drawer. She screamed again. He put them down and took up the blow-lamp, passing the flame lightly over the crystals which lay winking before him. By some fantastic stroke of luck—or perhaps some subtler thing than luck, Horty flashed a quick look through his lashes at that precise sec-

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ond. As the pale flame touched the jewels, he trembled violently—

But he did it on purpose. He felt nothing.

HE LOOKED at Zena. Her face was strained, her whole soul streaming through it, trying to tell him something...

He opened his mind to it. The Maneater saw his eyes open and hurled another of those frightful psychic impulses. Horty slammed his mind shut barely in time; part of the impulse got in and jolted him to the core.

For the first time he fully recognized his lack, his repeated failure to figure things clearly out for himself. He made a grim effort. Zena trying to tell him something. If he had just a second to receive her...but he was lost if he submitted to another such blow as the first one. There was something else, something about—*Solum!* The signalling hand on his shoulder, the hot eyes, bursting with something unsaid...

"Hit him again, Solum." The Maneater picked up the shears. Kay screamed again.

Again Solum bent over him; again the hand pressed his shoulder secretly, urgently. Horty looked the green man full in the eyes and opened up to the message which roiled there.

ASK THE CRYSTALS. Ask the crystals how to kill one of their dream-things. Find out from the crystals.

"What are you waiting for, Solum?"

Kay screamed and screamed. Horty closed his eyes and his mind. Crystals...not the ones on the table. The —the—*all* the crystals, which lived in—in—

Solum's hard hand landed on his neck. He let it drive him under, down and down into that lightless place full of structural, shimmering sensations. Resting in it, he drove his mind furiously about, questing. He was ignored completely, majestically. But there was no guard against him, either. What he wanted was there; he had only to understand it. He would not be helped or hindered.

He recognized now that the crystal-world was not loftier than the ordinary one. It was just—different. These self-sufficient abstracts of ego were the crystals, following their tastes, living their utterly alien existences, thinking with logic and with scales of values impossible to a human being.

He could understand some of it, untrammeled as he was with fixed ideas, though he was hammered into human mold too solidly to be able to merge himself completely with these unthinkable beings. He understood almost immediately that Monetre's theory of the crystal-dreams was true and not-true, like the convenient theory that an atom-nucleus had planetary particles rotating about it. The theory worked in simple practice. The manufacture of living things was a function with a purpose, but that purpose could never be explained in human terms. The one thing that was borne in on Horty was the almost total unimportance, to the crystals, of this function. They did it, but it served them about as much as a man is served by his appendix. And the fate of the creatures they created mattered as little to them as does the fate of a particular molecule of CO_2 exhaled by a man.

Nevertheless, the machinery by which the creation was done was there before Horty. Its purpose was beyond him, but he could grasp its operation. Studying it with his gulp-

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ing, eidetic mind, he learned a—a thing.

It was a thing to do. It was a thing like stopping a rolling boulder by blocking it with another rolled in its path. It was a thing like lifting the brush-holder on a DC motor, like cutting the tendons at the back of the hind legs of a running horse. It was a thing done with the mind, with a tremendous effort, which said a particular *stop!* to a particular kind of life.

Understanding, he withdrew, not noticed-or ignored-by the strange egos about him. He let in the light. He emerged, and felt his first real astonishment. His neck still stung from the blow of Solum's hand, which was still rebounding. The same scream which had begun when he went under came to its gasping conclusion as he came up. Bunny still stared between the slow blink of her drugged-looking lids; Zena still crouched with the same tortured expression of concentration in her pointed face.

The Maneater hurled his bolt. Horty turned it aside, and now he laughed.

PIERRE MONETRE rose, his face blackening with rage. Kay's wrist slipped out of his hand. Kay bounded for the door; Armand Bluett blocked her. She cowered away, across to Zena's corner, and slumped down, sobbing.

Horty knew what to do, now; he had learned a thing. He tested it with his mind, and knew immediately that it was not a thing which could be done casually. It meant a gathering of mental powers, a shaping of the mass of them, an aiming, a triggering. He turned his mind in on itself and began to work.

"You shouldn't have laughed at me," said the Maneater hoarsely. He raked in the two jewels and dropped them into a metal ash tray. He picked up the blow-lamp, meticulously adjusting the flame.

Horty worked. And still, a part of his mind was not occupied with the task. You can kill crystal-creatures, it said. The Maneater, yes, but—this is a big thing you are going to do. It may kill others...what others?

Solum.

Solum, ugly, mute, imprisoned Solum, who had, at the last moment, turned against the Maneater and had helped him. He had carried Zena's message, and it was his own death warrant.

He looked up at the green man, who was backing away, his flaring eyes still anxiously filled with the message, not knowing that Horty had read it and acted upon it seconds before. Poor, trapped, injured creature...

But it was Zena's message. Zena had always been his arbiter and guide. The fact that it was hers meant that she had considered the cost and had decided accordingly. Perhaps it was better this way. Perhaps Solum could not in some unfathomable way, enjoy a peace that life had never yielded him.

The strange force mounted within him, his polymorphic metabolism draining itself into the arsenal of his mind. He felt the strength drain out of his hands, out of the calves of his legs.

"Does this tickle?" snarled the Maneater. He swept the flame over the winking jewels. Horty sat rigidly, waiting, knowing that now this mounting pressure was out of his control, and that it would release itself when it reached its critical pressure. He kept his gaze fixed on the purpling, furious face.

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"I've always wondered," said the Maneater, "which crystal builds which part, when two of them go at it." He lowered the flame like a scalpel, stroking it back and across one of the crystals. "Does that—"

Then it came. Even Horty was unprepared for it. It burst from him, the thing he had understood from the crystals. There was no sound. There was a monstrous flare of blue light, but it was inside his head; when it had passed he was quite blind. He heard a throttled cry, the fall of a body. Slowly, then, knees, hip, head, another body. Then he gave himself up to pain, for his mind, inside, was like a field after a wind-driven brush fire, raw and burnt and smoking, speckled with hot and dying flames.

Blackness crept over it slowly, with here and there a stubborn luminous pain. His vision began to clear. He lay back, drained.

SOLUM had tumbled on the floor by his side. Kay Hallowell sat against the wall with her hands over her face. Zena leaned against her, her eyes closed. Bunny still sat on the floor, staring, weaving very slightly. Near the door, Armand Bluett was stretched out. Horty thought, the fool passes out like a corseted Victorian. He looked at the desk.

Pale and shaken, but erect, the Maneater stood. He said, "You seem to have made a mistake."

Horty simply stared at him dully. The Maneater said, "I would think that, with your talents, you would know the difference between a crystalline and a human being."

I never thought to look, he cried silently. *Will I ever learn to doubt? Zena always did my doubting for me!*

"You disappoint me. I always have the same trouble. My average is pretty high, though. I can spot 'em about eight times out of ten. I will admit, though, that *that* was a surprise to me." He tossed a casual thumb at Armand Bluett. "Oh well. Another heart case on the Fair Grounds. A dead crystalline looks just the same as a dead human. Unless you know what to look for." With one of those alarming changes of voice, he said with hate-filled sibilance, *"You tried to kill me..."* He wandered over to Horty's chair and looked down at Solum. "I'll have to learn to get along without old Solum. Nuisance. He was very useful." He kicked the long body idly, and suddenly swung around and landed a stringing slap on Horty's mouth. "You'll do twice what he did, and like it!" he shouted. "You'll jump when I so much as whisper!" He rubbed his hands.

"Oh-h-h..."

It was Kay. She had moved slightly. Zena's head had thumped down into her lap. She was chafing the little wrists.

"Don't waste your time," said the Maneater, casually. "She's dead."

Horty's fingertips, especially the growing stubs on his left hand, began to tingle. *She's dead. She's dead.*

At his desk, the Maneater picked up one of the crystals and tossed it, glancing at Zena. "Lovely little thing. Treacherous snake, of course, but pretty. I'd like to know where the crystal that made her got its model. As nice a job as you'll find anywhere." He rubbed his hands together. "Not a patch on what we'll have from now on, hey, Horty?" He sat down, fondling the crystal. "Relax, boy, relax. That was one hell of a blast. I'd like to learn a trick like that. Think I could? ...Maybe I'll leave it to you, at that. Seems to be

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quite a drain on you."

Horty tensed muscles without moving. Strength was seeping back into his exhausted frame. Not that it would do him much good. The rope would hold him if he were twice his normal strength.

She's dead. She's dead. When he said that, he meant Zena. Zena had wanted to be a real live normal human being...well, all strange people do, but Zena especially, because she wasn't human, not at all. That was why she'd never let him read her mind. She didn't want anyone to know. She wanted so *much* to be human. But she'd known. She must have known when she sent him the message through Solum. She knew it would kill her too. She was—more of a human being than any woman born.

I can move now, he thought. *But the rope...He's got to untie me some time.*

"You'll sit there without food or water until you rot," the Maneater said pleasantly, "or at least until you weaken enough to let me into that stubborn head of yours so I can blast out any silly ideas you may have about being your own master. You belong to *me*—three times over." He handled the two crystals lovingly. "Stay where you are!" he snarled, whirling on Kay Hallowell, who had begun to rise. Startled and broken, she sank down again. Monetre rose, went and stood over her. "Now, what to do with you. Hm."

There was a gentle tugging at Horty's legs. He checked the impulse to move, to look. The pressure of the rope came off his right ankle. His left.

"You could be a heart failure case too," the Maneater said pensively to Kay. "A little *curare*...no. The Judge is enough for one day."

A COOL FLAT blade slid up the inside of Horty's wrist, turned, and bit into the rope. Without bending his neck, Horty could just see the grey-green hand that wielded the knife. Freedom and hate combined to accelerate the return of strength to his body. He rose, flexing his hands, trying not to breathe noisily.

"Well, we'll dispose of you in some way," said the Maneater, returning to his desk, talking over his shoulder at the frightened girl. "And soon —*uh!*" He found himself face to face with Horty.

The Maneater's hand crept out and closed around the jewels. "Don't come one small half-inch nearer," he rasped, "or I'll smash these. You'll slump together like a bag of rotten potatoes. Don't move, now."

"Is Zena really dead?"

"As a doornail, son. I'm sorry. I'm sorry that it was so quick, I mean. She deserved a more artistic treatment. *"Don't move!"* He held the crystals together in one hand, like walnuts about to be cracked. "Better go back and sit down where it's comfortable." Their eyes met, held. Once, twice, the Maneater sent Horty his barbed hate. Horty did not flinch. "Wonderful defense," said the Maneater admiringly. "Now go and *sit* down!" His fingers tightened on the crystals.

Horty said, "I know a way to kill humans too." He came forward.

The Maneater scuttled back. Horty rounded the desk and came on. "You asked for it!" panted the Maneater. He closed his bony hand. There was a faint, tinkling crackle.

"I call it Havana's way," said Horty thickly, "after a friend of mine."

The Maneater's back was against the wall, round-eyed, pasty-faced. He goggled at the single intact crystal in his hand—like walnuts, only one

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broke when the two were crushed together—uttered a birdlike squeak, dropped the crystal, and ground it under his feet. Then Horty had both hands on his head. He twisted. They fell together. Horty wrapped his legs around the Maneater's chest, got another grip on the head, and twisted again with all his strength. There was a sound like a pound of dry spaghetti being broken in two, and the Maneater slumped.

Blackness showered in descending streamers around Horty. He crawled off the inert figure, pushing his face almost into Bunny's. Bunny's face was looking down and past him, and was no longer vacant and staring. Her lips were curled back from her teeth. Her neck was arched, the cords showing starkly. Gentle Bunny...she was looking at the dead Maneater, and she was laughing.

Horty lay still. Tired, tired...it was almost too much effort to breathe. He raised his chin to make it easier for air to pass his throat. This pillow was so soft, so warm... Feather-touches of hair touched his upturned face, delicately stroked his closed eyelids. Not a pillow; a round arm curved behind his head. Scented breath at his lips. She was big, now; a regular human girl, the way she always wanted to be. He kissed the lips. "Zee. Big Zee," he murmured.

"Kay. It's Kay, darling, you poor brave darling..."

He opened his eyes and looked up at her, his eyes a child's eyes for the moment, full of weariness and wonder. "Zee?"

"It's all right. Everything's all right now," she said soothingly. "I'm Kay Hallowell. Everything's all right."

"Kay." He sat up. There was Armand Bluett, dead. There was the Maneater, dead. There was—was—

He uttered a hoarse sound and scrambled uncertainly to his feet. He ran to the wall and picked Zena up and put her gently on the table. She had plenty of room... Horty kissed her hair. He gathered her hands together and called her quietly, twice, as if she were hiding somewhere near and was teasing him.

"Horty—"

He did not move. With his back to her, he said thickly, "Kay—where's Bunny?"

"She went to sit with Havana. Horty—"

"Go stay with her a little. Go on. Go on..."

She hesitated, and when she left, she ran.

HORTY HEARD a mourning sound, but he did not hear it with his ears. It was inside his head. He looked up. Solum stood there, silent, but the mourning sound appeared again in Horty's head. Horty did not ask Solum to go away.

After a time they talked.

"What'll we do with the Judge?"

It's dark now. I'll leave him near the midway. It will be heart failure.

"And the Maneater?"

The swamp. I'll take care of it.

"You're a big help, Solum. I feel sort of—lost. I would be, too, if it hadn't been for you, cutting those ropes."

Don't thank me. I haven't the brains for a thing like that. She did it. Zena. She told me exactly what to do. She knew what was going to happen. The Maneater always did think I was a crystalline. She knew that. She knew I was human, too. She knew everything. She did everything.

"Yeah. Yeah, Solum... What about the girl? Kay?"

Oh. I don't know.

"I think she better go back where

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she was working. Eltonville. I wish she could forget the whole thing."

She can.

"She—oh, of course. I can do that. Solum, she—"

I know. She loves you, just as if you were human. She thinks you are. She doesn't understand any of this.

"Yes. I—wish... Never mind. No I don't. I was—loved by Zena."

Yes. Oh, yes...and what are you going to do?

"Me? I don't know. Cut out, I guess. Play guitar somewhere."

What would she want you to do?

"I—"

The Maneater did a lot of harm. She wanted to stop him. Well, he's stopped. But I think perhaps she would like you to right some of the wrongs he's done. All over our carnival route, Horty—anthrax in Kentucky, deadly nightshade in the pasture lands up and down Wisconsin, puff adders in Arizona, polio and Rocky Mountain spotted fever in the Alleghenies; why, he even planted tsetse flies in Florida with his infernal crystals! I know where some of them are, but you could find the rest better even than he could.

"My God...and they mutate, the diseases, the snakes..."

Well?

"Who would I be working for? Who's going to run the—Solum! Why are you staring at the Maneater like that? What's your idea? You—you think I—"

Well?

"He was three inches taller...long hands...narrow face... I don't really see why not, Solum. No one has to know... Hey! Who said you had no brains?"

I did. She told me to suggest it to you if you didn't think of it yourself.

"She— Oh Zee, Zee... Solum! You're holding back something else. What is it?"

Just one more thing. Where did you come from?

"Two crystals made me. Then Zena, of course—she shaped me into just what she thought I should be. Why?"

You can bring crystals together. Even the Maneater did it.

"Suppose I can? What could they make for me that I'd want?"

Whatever you miss most.

"Do you think I could? Do you really think I could, Solum? —Even big? She always wanted to be big!"

You could try.

"I will, I will...everything she was, she gave to me. I'll keep it and give it back, if I can. Zee—Zena, honey. So long. We'll give you and Havana a nice sendoff tomorrow. But —I'll see you. I'll—see you..."

You'd better take care of Kay Hallowell now, before you change, Horty. Otherwise you'll scare her out of her wits. By the way—why didn't you die when the Maneater broke your crystals?

"That. Why, they were through with me. I don't know how long they'd been finished. Tell you what, though. When I was a kid I used to have to eat ants. Zee said my formic acid balance was out. Well, when I was about nine or ten, I quit wanting ants. It didn't occur to me to wonder why. I've *never* wondered why anything. But must have been when I was finished. I've been a mature, complete thing ever since I was ten years old! But I didn't know it. Zee didn't, either. She stood guard with her life over those jewels for years when she didn't even have to!"

PART OF A LETTER:

...in the hospital just resting up, Bobby Baby. I guess I just

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cracked under the strain. I don't remember a thing. They tell me I walked out of the store one evening and was found wandering four days later. Nothing had happened to me, really nothing, Bob. It's a weird thing to look back on—a hole in your life. But I'm none the worse for wear.

But here's some good news. Old Crawly-Fingers Bluett died of a heart attack at the carnival I went to that day. You know what? I bet someone who knows me saw me there and told him, and he came all the way to the carnival to see if he could find me! Well he didn't.

My job at Hartford's is waiting for me whenever I get back. And listen—remember the wild tale about the young guitarist that lent me $300 that awful night? He sent a note around to Hartford's for me. It said he had just inherited a business worth two million and I was to keep the money. I just don't know what to do. No one knows where he is or anything about him. He's left town permanently. One of the neighbors told me he had two little daughters. Anyway he had two little girls with him when he left. So the money's in the bank and Daddy's legacy in the bag.

So don't worry. Specially about me. As for those four days, they didn't leave a mark on me; well, a little bruise on one cheek, but that's nothing. They were probably good days. Sometimes when I'm waking up, I have a feeling—I can almost put my finger on it—it's sort of a half memory about loving somebody who was very, very good. But maybe I made that up. Now you're laughing at me...

* *

Part of a conversation:

"We can wait right here," said the roustabout. "In my fourteen years in the carnies, I never heard the likes o' this."

The new animal man rested his hand on the guys of the cook tent and listened, entranced. "Who in time is that?"

"The Maneater. The Boss. Up there by himself with that baby he adopted and his collection o' rhinestones or whatever they are. He picks 'em up all over. But don't he play a mess o' guitar?"

THE END

TOOTHSOME . . .

★ By Jon Barry ★

MAN'S BIGGEST weakness is his teeth. No other part of the body seems to give so much trouble. Teeth go bad in a hurry for no apparent reason—milk and vitamins to the contrary. But maybe the solution has been found. Dentists experimenting with ammoniated toothpastes and powders have reported an enormous decrease in tooth decay.

Once it was predicted that the man of the future wouldn't have a tooth left in his head—they would gradually disappear—like primitive man's tail. But now it looks like Futureman will have a set of perfect choppers, even if he eats nothing but vitamin pills. Ain't science grand!

MOVIE X-RAYS

★ By L. A. Burt ★

UNTIL RECENTLY it hasn't been possible to take moving picture x-rays which weren't pretty primitive. But scientists have finally synchronized the x-ray tube and camera so that perfect movies may be made. Now you can watch exactly what's happening in the human body without an operation! It's the answer to the doctor's prayer.

Already several lives have been saved. In one case, a man whose breathing apparatus was defective, was put under the machine. Doctors watched the throat-block in perfect detail. It was then simple to perform the operation. Result: the man is now healthy—and alive!

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ASTROGLOBE

By William Karney

WHEN THEY built the first astronomical observatory in space back in 3002, they called it "Astro-Globe No. One." and anchored it in an orbit two hundred kilo-miles out. A small telescope could pick out its red signal light because it moved so fast against the stars. It was a magnificent engineering achievement, the magnitude of which isn't realized even today.

It was still rocket drive in those days—no atomic converters—and everything down to the last gasket had to be brought up the hard way.

The men who did that job from the engineer to the lowliest mechanic were titans for work and geniuses at improvisation. All the structural members were aluminum, beryllium and magnesium alloys, but it still took a lot of trips to bring up that stuff. That was tough of course, but what was really hard was the actual work.

Try living a good portion of each day in a space-suit. Try working in it. And do these things under extremely dangerous conditions. Then go back and live in a gravity-less shell until the next day. It takes a real man.

Space Construction men tell the story of Hawking, the master mechanic on the job. They were trying to put a huge subsection of the dome into place. A half dozen men were handling the beam which weighed nothing of course but had an inertia of about thirty tons. The beam was drifting in position at a rather high clip, when the danger became apparent. The six men handling it were being backed against another beam. As sure as hell it would have sheared through them. Hawking saw the danger. He managed to slip his bulk in and take the shock. He was a powerful man and he restrained the drifting beam just long enough for the others to scramble out. Then the thing ground against him.

Well, they had to take off both his legs at the ankles; eleven months later he was back on the job with more enthusiasm then ever! It took men in those days. Now with robots and atomic rockets and tools they'd do the same job in three months and there wouldn't be a bit of danger. But there wouldn't be any men like Hawking on the job either!

THE LABYRINTH

By Sandy Miller

OF ALL THE weird cults that have presented their views to us, none is more fantastic in nature than that of the ancient, pre-Christian Cretans. The ceremonies and sacrifices associated with the Cretan worship of the Minotaur, the bull-headed god, makes even a fantasy writer's hair curl.

Because the bull was the object of veneration by the Cretans, they had numerous feasts and dances at which human sacrifice was a standard effect. Thus, there was a yearly event in which young maidens danced—using the word "dance" loosely—with the bulls, the earthly garb of the Minotaur's spirit. In these dances, ferocious, wild bulls would be released in the same arena with these lovely girls whose nude bodies were annointed with oils and perfumes.

The girls were athletes as well as dancers. They would move before the bulls, leaping over them, jumping astride their backs and otherwise evading death by the narrowest of margins. And of course, many would fall, to be trampled to death beneath the lashing hooves, to be torn to pieces by the deadly horns.

Again each year would see the annual ceremony of the Labyrinthine Minotaur. The most beautiful girl and the most handsome boy, several couples in fact, would be selected to wander in a gigantic maze built into a cliff. The couples would slowly wend their way through the tortuous passage, knowing that death awaited them at the end. In what form they could not guess, nor did they care for they regarded it as the end of all life anyway—the grateful happy end.

History doesn't tell us what sort of beast or monster performed the actual murderous rites in the center of the Cretan labyrinth. We can only guess. Possibly it was a huge alligator, or a gigantic snake, or even more bulls. Whatever the means it must have been terrible. The lair of the Minotaur was covered with the picked bones of his victims. One or two have speculated that the Minotaur may have been a prehistoric reptile who survived. We do not know, but our imagination terrifies us when we think of the cruelty and bestiality which went under the name of theocracy.

Surely such a picture is worthy of a fantasy writer's mind!

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DOOM SHIP

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Robert Moore Williams

When the space ship crashed, the lives of twenty humans lay in the hands of a fanatic!

"THE ship's falling!" Screaming the words, the girl in the yellow dress tossed the cocktail, with which she had been celebrating the successful takeoff from Venus, straight up against the metal ceiling of the main cabin with a sudden gesture.

To John Balfour, who of necessity had developed a feel for such things—along with a feel for a thousand other things that helped a man stay alive on the Veiled Planet—it had seemed for some time that the ship had been yawning badly from her course. The steering jets had roared too often, he had thought, and the ship had been nudged southward well away from the lanes usually followed by space ships taking off from Venus. He had shrugged the feeling aside. Presumably the pilot knew his business. Presumably pompous Captain Vincent knew how to get a com-

Lora looked on startled, as Balfour's fist lashed out and caught the man flush on the chin . . .

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mercial liner into space. Presumably—

The lifting jets faltered, the girl screamed, the floor of the cabin tilted downward. The girl, grabbing hastily for a handhold, lost her footing and landed in Balfour's lap.

In other circumstances, he would have thought it was quite nice to have this curvesome chunk of pulchritudinous female animal in his arms. In fact, sitting there watching her, he had been wondering if maybe, before the ship eased in to Luna Station on Earth's moon—

There were a lot of things he had missed during the two years he had spent on Venus and women was one of them. The human women on Venus were a wary lot, generally, and the native girls just didn't— Well, they did, of course, but it wasn't the same. Now if this Lora Calhoun—

Balfour's pleased anticipations had been interrupted when the jets faltered and Lora Calhoun herself landed in his lap in a flurry of yellow skirt that revealed two very attractive legs, though he did not have time to notice such things.

A loudspeaker in the ceiling suddenly began to blurt words.

"All passengers in your seats at once. Fasten safety belts. Prepare for emergency landing."

The speaker was striving for a calm tone of voice. He wasn't succeeding. The sudden faltering of the lifting jets and the tilt of the floor of the ship had frightened the passengers. Actually, so far as space ships were concerned, there was no such thing as an emergency landing. There was either a safe landing or there was no landing at all. The elaborate system of padded chairs with attached safety belts was largely to make the passengers feel safe. It fooled nobody. When a space ship actually crashed, all that was left to do was to pick up the pieces—if they could be found at all.

Balfour caught one glimpse of the passengers scuttling for their chairs like startled rabbits diving into their holes at the appearance of a fox. At the front end of the cabin, the Negro steward, who a minute before had been mixing and serving drinks, was holding on to the bar with both hands. In Balfour's arms the girl was squealing.

The jets caught, burst out with a full-throated roar. Groans ran through the steel hull of the ship. The floor tilted. Balfour held his breath. If the jets held—

Through the port he caught a glimpse of something that warned him the jets had better hold. For a minute, the eternal cloud banks of Venus had lifted. Below him was spread a vast panorama of jungle, of mountains lifting up out of swamps, of rivers winding their way through that swamp, of inter-connecting canals. From this height the cities were not visible, but he knew they were there, hidden by the jungle, cleverly built into the mountains.

THE WORLD down below him was Go-roum, the impenetrable home of the savage warrior races of Venus. So far as Balfour knew—and it was part of his job to know—only one human had ever penetrated the Go-roum and had emerged alive to tell his story. He was that human. He had spent the better part of two years down there in that festering green tangle. During that time there hadn't been a minute when his life had not been in danger. If the Roum had penetrated his disguise, if they had suspected his purpose there, they would have sliced off his head with no more compunction than they

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showed in slicing off the head of a jungle lizard.

They were warriors. From the oldest doddering graybeard to the youngest boy in his cradle, they practiced daily with weapons. They were savages. They cared nothing for the life of any creature, including themselves. But they were not fools.

On the contrary, Balfour had clear evidence that the scientific advancement of the Roum equalled that of humans in some respects, and in one area at least, exceeded the discoveries made by earth's scientists.

When the first human landing had been made on Venus, the Roum had been the masters of the planet, holding tributary every other race, exacting tribute from every tribe, but at the first appearance of a space ship in their sky they had dropped their conquests as if they were suddenly too hot to hold and had pulled back into the jungle homeland from which they had sprung. Every Roum administrator, every Roum warrior backing him up, every Roum scientist investigating local resources had stopped work at a single command and had headed for home.

The liberated tribes had hailed the humans with great joy, as liberators, but the humans, viewing the hegira of the Roum, had not been happy about the situation.

If you startle a tiger at his kill and the tiger takes one look at you and the gun you carry and, recognizing the deadliness of the gun, does not dispute his kill with you, you know one thing for sure. *You've got to watch out for that tiger!*

The humans knew they had to look out for the Roum. The day would come when the Roum would emerge from their jungle strongholds to be at human throats.

Human suspicions were strengthened when they tried to make friends with the Roum. The Roum were willing to be quite friendly, outside their jungle, they sent deputations of scientists, to exchange information, they sent other deputations, to examine space ships, but the information they were willing to give in return was useless and they were not willing to permit humans to visit their homeland. The gate there was jammed shut, locked tight, and triple barred. Whatever they were doing there, they considered their own business. They didn't want any visitors, they didn't want any guests, they didn't want any scientific observers. All they wanted was to get inside a space ship.

Orders from up above had soon placed all space ships, all space ports, all space crewmen, off-limits to Roum.

You don't give a gun to a tiger. You don't give space ships, or the secret of their construction, to the savagest race of warriors in the solar system, not if you've got good sense. Instead you put them in the strictest kind of quarantine, you isolate them as you would isolate the carriers of a dangerous disease, hoping that time and endless patience will enable you to make friends with them. While you are giving them time to learn how to live in peace, you keep both eyes wide open, watching for the flash of a knife being drawn, you keep both ears keenly alert, listening for the creep of stealthy feet coming up behind you.

Especially you don't give them space ships when rumors begin to come through that they have a new weapon. What that new weapon was, no man knew. John Balfour had spent almost two years, as a secret agent, trying to find out what it was.

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Some of the results of the use of that weapon he had seen, the scarred side of a mountain that looked as if it had been hit by a continuous succession of thunderbolts, a ragged, burned section of jungle that looked as if it had been hit by an atomic bomb, only no bomb had been exploded there. Roum scientists didn't have that secret yet. But they had something else, something perhaps as dangerous and as deadly, something that gashed the side of a mountain, something that mowed down the jungle.

He had seen where the weapon had been tested. When it was, its effective range, how it worked, he did not know. But one thing was certain, he did not want to see these weapons mounted in fleets of space ships, he did not want to see the Roum warriors turned loose in the lanes of space.

Grim-faced Admiral Hatridge, in Venus Port, had listened to his report, and had ordered him back to earth in person to disclose his findings to the highest UN administrative authority, who must make the decision as to the action to be taken here on Venus. Perhaps his action might be a full-scale minor war, against the Roum, as a preventative measure, but likely it would not be. You can't successfully atom bomb a jungle thousands of square miles in area. Also, you don't use an atom bomb on a hornet's nest unless you are sure you can cope with the remaining hornets. Also, you just don't use an atom bomb unless you have no other alternative, not if you're human.

DURING THE split second in which the jets faltered and caught, during which the loudspeaker shouted its commands and the passengers scuttled for their cushioned chairs and safety belts, these thoughts passed through John Balfour's mind. In his mind was one other thought. *If the ship crashed here, if the ship landed here, Roum scientists would have what they wanted—the secrets of space ship construction.* Even from a wrecked ship, they could learn too much.

The girl twisted in his lap. The forward jets faltered, their steady roar became a broken blast. Balfour scrambled to his feet, dropped the startled girl in the chair he had just left, and headed forward for the control room.

Perhaps nothing could be done, but if anything could be done, now was the time to do it.

Two men were in the control room, pompous Captain Vincent and the pilot. They had their heads together and their eyes on the instrument panel. Captain Vincent looked up as the door opened. Surprise showed on his face.

"No passengers allowed in here. Get to hell out."

Technically, the captain was in the right. Passengers were not permitted in control rooms, especially during an emergency. But Balfour had no intention of letting a technicality stop him.

"Captain—"

"I'm doing everything humanly possible to save the ship. I don't want any advice from a passenger."

"You're going to get some," Balfour spoke. "Captain, this ship is over the Go-roum."

"What?" Vincent gasped the word. Involuntarily he turned toward the port. Outside there was nothing but mist. "You're crazy. We're a hundred miles north of the Go-roum." The captain's eyes jerked toward the pilot, then came back again to Balfour. "Who the hell are you? What do you want?"

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"I haven't got time to tell you who I am. What I want is this: Don't make a forced landing here. If we have a choice of landing here and landing somewhere else, then try to land somewhere else. Try to land out of the Go-roum, no matter how much additional risk you have to run."

Captain Vincent's face turned purple. "Are you trying to tell me to risk my life and the lives of my crew and passengers by gliding this ship an extra hundred miles when I see a chance to set it down in safety here—"

"I'm telling you to take that chance," Balfour answered.

"Look, Captain!" the pilot shouted. The radar screen in front of him had come to life, revealing a high, jungle-covered plateau. What was hidden under the growth of trees the mist-probing radar did not reveal, but it showed one fact clearly—the plateau was fairly level. Beyond it were high mountains. Below it was a broken tangle of impenetrable gorges. The ship was miles above it but, with careful handling, it could be set down on the plateau.

"We can land there," the pilot stated. The broken roar of the jets accented his meaning. "With luck, we can take off again, after the ship is repaired."

Captain Vincent made his decision instantly. "Then land there." His hand went inside his coat pocket, came out with a flat, snub-nosed automatic. His eyes glared at Balfour. "Get to hell out of my control room."

BALFOUR sighed and stepped backward through the door. It was too much to ask the average run of human beings to risk their lives on the chance that other men might live yet this was what he had been trying to do here in this control room. If this ship fell into the hands of the Roum, if their scientists had a chance to study it, if the Roum warriors with their vicious secret weapon were loosed on the lanes of space, then certainly other men would die, men who had never heard of the Roum.

Counting passengers and crew, there were not over twenty human beings on this ship. Captain Vincent had refused to take a chance with their lives when taking that chance might have given untold thousands a better chance for life in some future that was to come. A few might have died here, that thousands might live later.

For a moment, John Balfour considered with pleasure the thought of throttling Captain Vincent. "The damned fool! Even if he saves his neck by landing here, the Roum will chop off his head soon enough."

Down there in that jungle the Roum would certainly see a space ship in distress over their land. It would be a spectacle that would interest them as nothing else would. They might keep alive the human occupants of that ship, until they had learned everything the humans knew, but there would come a time when the lives of human cattle would no longer be of value to them. Then—

There comes a time when a man accepts the fact that he is going to die. This time came to John Balfour now. If the ship crashed, he would die. If the ship landed safely, the Roum would get him. No matter which way the scales dipped now, the answer was the same.

Some men accept their fate with sullen indifference, some accept it with paralysis, some, snatching at straws, scream with fear. Captain Vincent had been one of the straw-snatchers. Balfour accepted it in

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none of these ways. He was still alive. Something might yet be done. Warning might be given. He hurried to the radio room.

A word from him to Admiral Hatridge in Venus Port that a space ship was down in the Go-roum would bring a space cruiser in a hell of a hurry. If worst came to worst, an atomb bomb could blow the wrecked ship into fragments of molten metal so small that no scientist could determine how they had once functioned. Admiral Hatridge would issue an order to drop such a bomb, if he had to! If he knew in time that such an order was needed!

Kicking open the door of the radio room, Balfour stopped, appalled.

A hammer had been used in here. Nothing else could account for the wreckage that had been done. The panels shielding the RF transmitters had been effectively smashed. Behind the panels the transmitting tubes were a tangle of twisted filaments and broken grids. Tuning coils had been smashed. The key, for code operation, and the mike, for voice transmission, had been pounded into broken metal and smashed plastic.

Yes, a hammer had been used to accomplish the destruction here. Whoever had wielded the hammer had used it first of all on the head of the radio operator. He sprawled forward on the floor, a youth with his sleeves rolled up as if he was ready for work. The back of his head had been smashed like an egg-shell.

No SOS, no warning, no call for help, would ever go out over this radio transmitter. This radio operator would never pound his key sending out an urgent warning to the admiral at Venus Port that a space ship was down in the Go-roum.

At the thought of what this wrecked radio room meant, Balfour took an involuntary step backward. In the throbbing roar of the faltering jets, he did not hear the step in the passageway behind him.

Nor did he feel the blackjack hit him. He didn't know anything had hit him. Suddenly, he just didn't know—anything.

CHAPTER II

THE SOFT musical chirp of the *creech*, the tree lizard, came to his ears. For a moment, he thought he was back on Venus again, in the jungle, but on second thought he knew this was not right. He was on a space ship headed for earth. But, if this was true, how did it happen he could hear the musical chirp of a lizard that lived in the jungle of Venus?

It was too much of a problem. He gave up trying to solve it. Voices came to his ears. Somewhere men were arguing. Frightened men. He listened without any great interest. What were frightened men to him? Something wet and soft passed over his face.

"What are we going to do?" Squeaky Voice said.

"I still say our best bet is to take guns and supplies from the ship and head straight into the jungle," Firm Voice answered. There was strength in this voice. Balfour decided he liked the man who owned it.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen," a soothing voice spoke. "We can remain right where we are, in perfect safety. In forty-eight hours, at the longest, the ship will be repaired. Then we can take off again."

Dimly, Balfour recognized this voice as belonging to Captain Vincent. Who was Captain Vincent? At this moment, he didn't know. He didn't much care. The voices came

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again but he had lost interest. Something soft and wet was passing over his face again. He opened his eyes.

Kneeling on the ground directly in front of him was as beautiful a pair of nylon-clad knees as he had ever seen. There was a runner, he noticed, in one of the stockings, and the pink flesh showed through. There was a yellow dress— He lifted his gaze. The higher up he looked, the better it was.

"I see you've come to," a girl's voice said. "And started acting just like every other man."

"Is that wrong?" Balfour said. He didn't know what he was talking about.

"No, I guess not," the girl answered promptly. "A man who didn't act like that wouldn't be much good."

"Oh," he said. "What makes a man a good man?"

"Oh, strength and courage and a sense of fair play, and a lot of other things. How do you feel?"

"Fine," he said. It was a lie and he knew it. He sat up. The effort made the world reel around him. He grabbed at the ground and waited for his vision to clear. The girl slipped an arm under his shoulder. "Thanks," he said. It was odd that he couldn't remember her name. There were some things about her he could remember, but definitely. Unfortunately her name was not one of them.

In front of him, at the edge of a sheared swath of broken jungle growth, a space ship rested. The main lock was open. Two men were crawling cautiously around the lifting jets in the bow, examining them. Other men were cutting down trees, clearing away underbrush, slashing away with axes and with long knives. They worked like men whose lives depended on their speed.

"So she got down all right?" he spoke.

"At the last moment, the jets came on," the girl answered. "It wasn't a bad landing, except that it was in the wrong place."

"At the last moment—" This seemed important, somehow. He tried to think how. Thinking at this moment was a difficult task. There were blank spots in his mind and the back of his head hurt. He ran exploratory fingers over the sore spot, winced as he touched the bruise there. "How'd I get this?"

"You must have bumped your head when we landed," the girl said.

"Ah," he said. This was one possible explanation. It didn't sound right somehow but he couldn't, at the moment, see what was wrong with it. A pompous man in a uniform with a a lot of gold braid was bending over him.

"Glad to see you have regained consciousness," the man was saying. "Are you all right now?"

"Nope," Balfour answered. Dimly he recognized this man as Captain Vincent. The captain's face radiated determined cheerfulness but his eyes were worried and fretful. The captain looked over his shoulder. "I can't remember much," Balfour said.

"Probably a mild concussion," Captain Vincent said. "After a severe blow on the head, the memory is often blank as to the events that took place a few hours before the accident. Nothing serious. The important thing is not to worry. We'll be out of here within forty-eight hours—"

"Fory-eight hours?" The words touched a responsive chord somewhere in Balfour's mind. At the touch, part of his memory came flooding back. He got quickly to his feet. He remembered now, who Captain Vincent was, and he remembered who he was and where he was. "Cap-

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tain, we can't possibly remain here forty-eight hours! We've got to take off immediately, within the hour, if that is possible."

"Can't do it," Captain Vincent answered.

"But we've got to do it. Captain, we're in the Go-roum—"

"I don't care if we're in hell, we can't take off immediately. That's final." The picture of outraged dignity, Captain Vincent stalked away toward the ship.

BALFOUR rubbed his head. His mind was still blank, in spots. He couldn't remember how he had received the lick on the head. For that matter, he couldn't remember how he had gotten out of the ship.

"I saw you in the passageway and dragged you out," the girl explained. "I—we were all afraid the ship might blow up."

"Blow up?" The words reached into his mind and struck a responsive chord. His clenched fist crashed into his open hand. "That's the answer!" Excitement crept into his voice. "Captain Vincent!"

"What the hell do you want now?" Captain Vincent waited for him to come up.

"We've got to make preparations to blow up the ship, if the Roum come!" Balfour said. He tried to keep his voice calm, he tried to act as if his suggestion was completely reasonable. It *was* reasonable to him. The important thing, the only important thing, was to keep a space ship out of the hands of the Roum.

"Are you out of your head?" Captain Vincent gasped.

"It won't be difficult," Balfour explained. "We'll run wires into the fuel tanks. If the ship is repaired in time, we'll take off. If the Roum arrive before the repairs are complete —Boom!" He made a gesture with his hands to indicate the violent flare of a tremendous explosion.

All color drained out of Captain Vincent's face as he listened. "Of course," he said. "That's a splendid idea."

"You'll do it?" Balfour's face beamed. This had been easier than he had expected. Maybe it had been too easy.

"I'll get the electrician on it right away," the captain said. "You lie down and rest. Don't worry about it." The captain continued toward the ship. He moved at a trot now and he looked back over his shoulder as if he was afraid Balfour was following him. Balfour went back to the group of passengers.

"What was that you said about blowing up the ship?" the girl spoke. She seemed scared and worried. He wondered why.

"If worst comes to worst, that's what we've got to do," he said.

"Why?" A little paunchy, squeaky-voice passenger shot the single word at him.

He tried to tell them why. Listening, they gathered around him in a tense little group. Light filtered down through the leaves of the jungle growth overhead. Somewhere a *creech* chirped musically. When he had finished, the passengers were silent.

"You mean we've got to take a chance on death so that somebody else will have a better chance to live?" Lora Calhoun spoke slowly.

"That's it exactly," he said. She seemed to understand what he meant. A tall bronzed-faced man seemed to understand.

"You're crazy!" the little paunchy passenger screamed the words. "I don't believe the Roum exist. If they do exist, I don't believe they will

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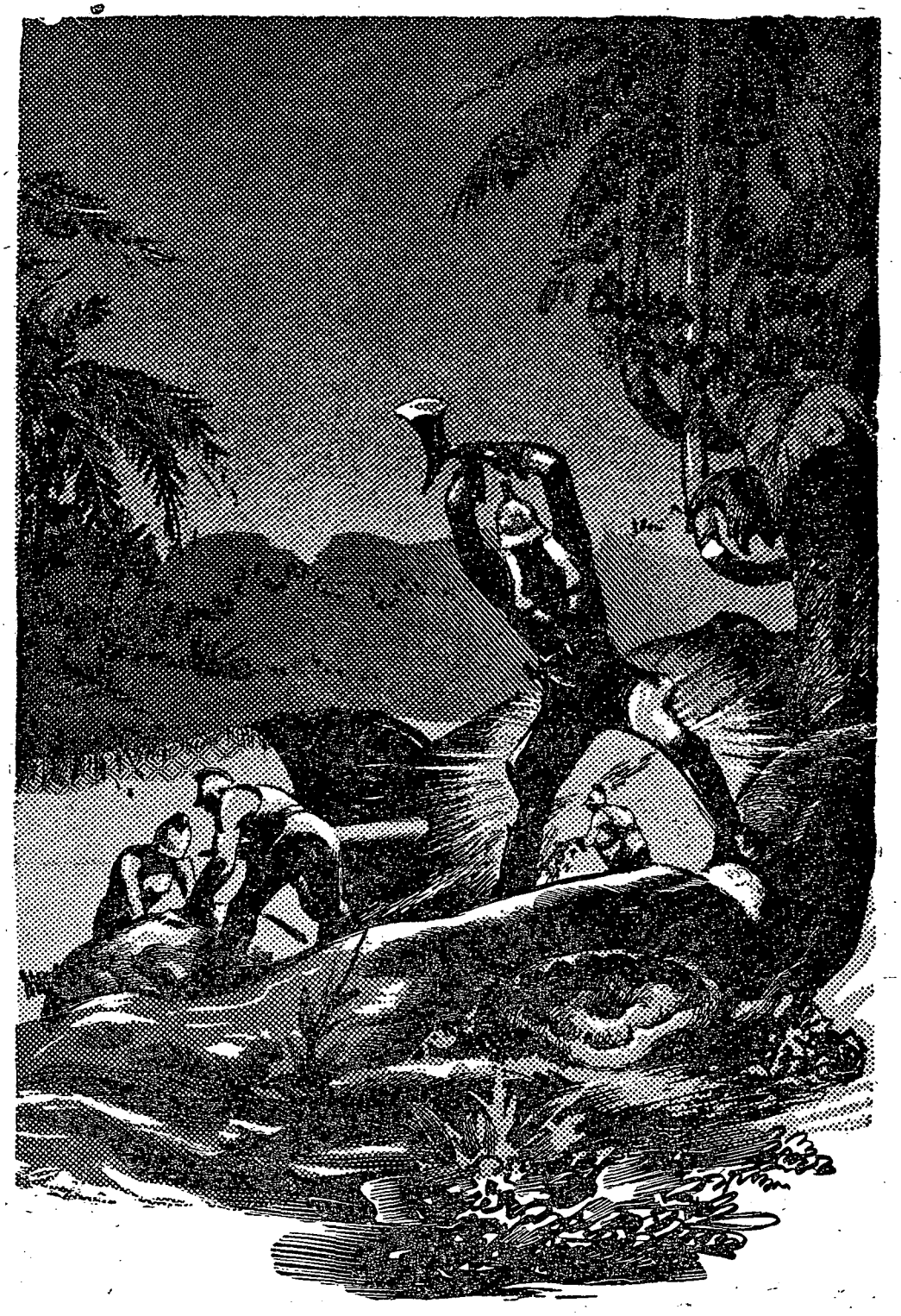

They worked fast and hard, readying camp before the deadly Go-roum could find them.

bother us."

"They exist all right," the bronzed-faced man spoke. He extended his hand to Balfour. "My name is Jenkins. I've been a jungle trader and I know the Roum. You've hit the nail right on the head. If it comes to a blow-off, you can count on me."

"Thanks," Balfour said. He took the offered hand. The grip was firm and strong. Dimly he remembered this man as having the firm voice he had first heard when he was recovering consciousness. He had liked the voice then, he liked the man even better. "I don't imagine there will be any trouble. Captain Vincent has agreed to wire the fuel tanks."

"Maybe," Jenkins said. "Maybe there's trouble on the way right now." He looked toward the ship.

BALFOUR turned. Captain Vincent had emerged from the lock. Two men were with him. The captain spoke to the two men and pointed toward the passengers. The two men nodded, moved forward. Balfour watched them. In his mind, something seemed to click. Suddenly he remembered what he had forgotten. His memory, jarred out of focus by the blow he had received, gave him back a picture of the wrecked radio room, the dead radio operator. He remembered the quick step that had sounded behind him as he backed out of the radio room and he realized at last that the jolt he had received had been a blow from a blackjack.

Who had struck it?

He didn't know. But he had grim suspicions. With those suspicions came an even grimmer thought. Perhaps the landing of the space ship here in the Go-roum had not been an accident! Lora Calhoun had said that the jets had come on full force just before the ship landed. That one fact alone ought to have made him suspicious. It would be easy to juggle the controls and fake an emergency, then cut on the jets so that the ship landed safely. If there was an investigation later, all the passengers and the crew could be called on to testify that the emergency had been real. The weight of their evidence might force Admiral Hatridge, in Venus Port, to believe that the ship had been forced to land in the Go-roum.

That would clear the crew and the passengers of complicity in faking a forced landing. Somebody would have a fortune in Roum gold and would be safe to enjoy it. The Roum would have what they wanted most of all—a space ship.

Watching the two men approach, Balfour's hand went automatically inside his coat, feeling for the gun he had carried on Venus. Too late he remembered that when the ship had taken off, he had presumed he was safe and had packed the gun in his bag. His hand came away empty.

"Balfour?" The two men stopped in front of him and the taller spoke a single word. They were members of the crew. They had a job to do but their faces revealed they didn't much like the job.

"I'm Balfour."

"You're under arrest."

"Who said so?"

"Captain Vincent said so. He said you are acting like you're crazy and that he wanted you arrested and confined." The speaker shrugged. He was just a member of the crew. The shrug said that when he was given orders, he had no choice except to obey them.

"Okay." In indifference, in saying that he too, had a job to do, that he too was under orders, Balfour's shrug matched the shoulder movement of

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the speaker. He stepped forward. With all his weight behind it, his left fist went out. It landed full on the jaw of the taller of the two men who had been sent to arrest him.

The man went over backward. He hit the ground with a thud. He wiggled, shook his head, and tried to get to his feet. Behind him, Balfour heard a passenger gasp. He heard the girl cry out.

"Watch it, the other one has a gun!"

It pleased him, somehow, to know that she was trying to warn him. He saw the second, shorter crewman back up hastily when he swung his fist, he saw the man snatch at the bulky pocket of his coveralls. The man he had knocked down was also reaching for a pocket. Both of them had guns. Both were prepared to use them.

Balfour didn't hesitate. He moved toward the second man. Something went past him, fast. He caught a glimpse of Jenkins. The second man was trying to back away. Jenkins went in like a tackle, diving at the man's knees. The trader and the crewman went down together.

ON THE ground, the man whom Balfour had hit first was getting the gun out of his pocket. Balfour bent down. "I'll take it," he said. Dazedly, the fellow yielded the gun. Balfour moved to help Jenkins. The trader, gun in hand, was already getting to his feet.

"You work fast," Balfour said.

"I've had some practice," Jenkins said.

"You make up your mind fast too," Balfour said.

"Meaning about which side I'm on?" Jenkins said. "Hell, I know a man when I see one." He grinned, then the grin changed to a frown. "Anyhow I didn't like the way the ship went down. The jets came on a little too pat to save us from crashing. I didn't like it." The frown grew grimmer. "The question is—what next? Unless I miss my guess, it's not going to be healthy for you and me around here."

"You haven't missed your guess," Balfour said.

In the lock of the ship, Captain Vincent was waving his hands and pointing toward them. Two crewmen dropped to the ground. Each carried a sub-machine gun.

"Are you a good man in the jungle?" Balfour spoke, to Jenkins.

"Fair," the trader answered.

"That's where I'm going. Come if you want." Keeping the startled group of passengers between him and the men advancing from the ship, Balfour moved toward the jungle. Jenkins came right behind him. They were slipping out of sight in the jungle growth when Balfour realized that another person was following them.

"Hey!" he called out protestingly.

"I'm going with you," Lora Calhoun spoke. "You're not leaving me behind with this bunch."

His eyes were on the yellow dress she wore. Already it was coming apart at the seams. He could imagine what the sharp thorns of jungle creepers would do to that dress. "Do you know what you're doing?" he said.

"Nope," she answered. "But I know why." Her eyes were on his face. There was hunger in them as if she saw something she had not known existed. "You meant what you said about being willing to die so that somebody else might have a chance to live, didn't you?"

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"I meant it," he answered.

"Then I'm coming with you," she said.

In spite of the meaning back of her words, he opened his mouth to protest, then closed it with a snap as something blurred across the tangled area of broken growth in front of the space ship. A streak of light seemed to leap from the jungle. It was an odd kind of light. It blurred the air as it moved and it produced a crackling sound in the air, like the discharge of static electricity.

Coming from the edge of the green growth fifty yards away from Balfour, it leaped at, and struck the foremost of the two armed members of the crew trotting toward the group of passengers half hidden under the green growth.

The man flung his hands up in the air. His manner was jerky, he acted as if he had touched—or been touched by—a high tension electric wire. The tommy-gun described a short arc in the air. The man screamed, a sound ripped from the cavernous depths of his throat and from the deeper depths of his being. Balfour had heard a few men scream like this. He knew what it meant. When such a scream was ripped from the hidden depths of a man, it meant that death had found him both suddenly and unexpectedly. Like a rag doll falling, this man went down. When he touched the ground, he did not move again.

At the edge of the jungle, peering through the sights of a strange weapon that looked like a cross between a sub-machine gun and a miniature radar set, Balfour caught a glimpse of a dark face.

He snatched at the girl's arm, yanked her past him. "Crawl!" he whispered.

The Roum had arrived.

CHAPTER III

HIDING AT the edge of the jungle, not daring to try to escape for fear that flight itself would reveal them, Balfour and Jenkins and Lora Calhoun saw the results of the piece of treachery that had taken place here. The instant the first shot was fired—apparently the Roum fighter who fired it had mistakenly thought that the tommy-gun was a far more dangerous weapon than it was—fighters instantly began popping out of the jungle. They came from four different places, in long files, each warrior on the run. Though no commands were given, each fighter seemed to know instantly what to do. The files formed a circle around the ship. Every human was caught within the circling net thus flung out. Instantly the net began to draw tighter around the ship.

Captain Vincent appeared in the lock. As if his appearance was a signal, a dozen Roum fighters detached themselves and ran to him. The captain greeted them with bristling anger. "What kept you so long? You were supposed to be here within an hour after we landed. I've had the devil's own time trying to keep the passengers and the crew under control. One of the passengers even wanted to blow up the ship. You should have been here sooner."

His anger was vitriolic. The Roum leader smiled placatingly. "We came as quickly as we could. The ship was not put down in the spot where you were told to land."

In this moment it was obvious that the Roum had succeeded in getting through to at least one member of the crew of a space ship and this in spite of all the precautions that had been taken to prevent it.

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"That dirty son—sold all of us out!" Jenkins gritted. Unconsciously he lifted the pistol he had taken from one of the two men who had tried to arrest Balfour, trying to line up the sights on Captain Vincent.

"Cut it out!" Balfour hissed. "How long do you think we would remain alive if they found us?"

"Not long," Jenkins admitted. Reluctantly he lowered the muzzle of the pistol. "But it might be worth it if I could take him with me."

"Wait and see," Balfour said.

"What's there to see if we do wait?"

"If I know the Roum, there will be something to see, and we won't have to wait long. Watch!"

A file of Roum fighters were already entering the main lock of the vessel. One by one the members of the crew who had been working inside the ship began to emerge, each escorted by a roum warrior, until the entire crew and the passengers had been lined up at the stern of the ship. Under guard, the humans stood there, milling like uneasy cattle that have been captured by wolves.

A command rang out in the Roum tongue. Balfour knew enough of the Roum speech to know what was going to happen next. He saw the platoon of warriors step forward and lift their weapons. Involuntarily he covered his eyes.

Captain Vincent's voice lifted in a shout. "No! You promised you would see me safely to—" The shout died in a sudden scream.

Balfour didn't see it but the screams told him what was happening. The humans were being massacred. When the screams died out, he opened his eyes. All along the stern of the ship dead bodies lay on the ground. The Roum leader was stepping forward to deliver the *coup de grace* to a squirming human who was not yet dead.

BESIDE him on the ground, Balfour could hear Jenkins breathing in short panting gasps. Lora Calhoun seemed to have stopped breathing entirely. She had changed completely from the girl Balfour had first met, with a cocktail in her hand, celebrating the take-off from Venus.

"You'll get over it in time," he said roughly. "Come along now. We've got to get away from here before they start checking the dead bodies against the list of passengers and crew and discover they haven't got all of us."

"Anyhow Vincent got exactly what was coming to him," Jenkins said. "That's something, anyhow."

"Something—but not enough," Balfour said. They slid silently into the protection of the jungle. No shout came from behind them, announcing their discovery. The Roum were still too busy with the ship to take time to wonder if they had destroyed all of its human occupants. Later, the question would occur to them.

Within half a mile, Balfour stopped. The impenetrable tangle had closed completely around them and the ship was no longer visible. He squinted at the sun. "Couple of more hours of daylight," he said. Jenkins nodded. The girl was silent. Creeper briars had already begun to do their deadly work on the yellow dress.

"We had better take stock," Jenkins said. "We've got two pistols and no food. The first jungle cat, the first tiger lizard that comes along will just naturally gobble us up. There's over a hundred miles of this jungle to the first trading post." He shook his head. "I make the odds ten to one against our ever making it," he said. "That presumes the Roum

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don't discover our existence and take after us, in which case the odds are a hundred to one—against."

Balfour nodded. "So you two get started," he said.

"Eh?" Jenkins was startled. "What do you mean—'get started'? What about you?"

"I want to have a crack at destroying that ship," Balfour said. "The filler pipes leading to the fuel tanks open through a special lock just forward of the stern. I thought after dark I could open the lock, unscrew the filler pipe caps, run wires down into the tanks—"

"Where are you going to get the wires?" Jenkins said. "Where are you going to get the batteries?"

"Well—"

The trader laughed. "Don't you ever give up, pal? Don't you ever admit you're licked?"

"Sure," Balfour admitted. "It's just that, back there when I thought the ship was going to crash, I decided I was as good as dead. Since I'm already dead, it doesn't matter what kind of chances I take." He groped through his mind for his reasons, found he didn't actually know them. "So you two try to get through to Venus Port and report to Admiral Hatridge what has happened here. I'll stay and have one last crack at the ship."

"The admiral will wait a long time if he waits for me," Jenkins said. "I don't duck out and leave a pal in trouble."

"But somebody's got to get a report to the admiral," Balfour said. His gaze centered on the girl.

"Not me," she said. "And that makes it unanimous."

"I guess we'll all stay," Balfour said. "As soon as it gets dark—" He looked back toward the ship.

In the Venusian jungle night comes quietly. Because of the eternal cloud banks overhead, the light is never very bright. The shadows begin to firm long before the sun is gone, resulting in a misty twilight. In that twilight, the night-roaming creatures begin to awaken, the jungle cats begin to prowl, the tiger lizards move from the quiet glades where they have been hiding during the day.

As the twilight thickened, the three humans moved back toward the ship. Ahead of them, lights gleamed in the jungle.

"They've hooked lights on to the ship's generators and strung them outside," Jenkins said. "But what are they doing?"

ABOUT THE ship, the Koum were as busy as bees. Immense activity was going on in the jungle. Trees were being chopped down, creeper vines were being carefully pulled from their positions and with their roots still in place, the long green tendrils were being led toward the ship. In this rain-soaked hothouse those vines would grow ten feet in a single day.

"C a m o u f l a g e," Balfour said. "They're hiding the ship."

He knew the camouflage would be effective. Within a few days, the fast-growing vines would hide the ship completely from observation from the sky. Since the vines were alive, even infra-red photography would not detect any difference in the vegetation on the plateau.

When the ship failed to report in at Luna Station, a search would be instituted for it but no search would ever discover this hiding place.

"Smart son-of-a-guns," Jenkins said.

"Their smartest development is that weapon they carry," Balfour said. "That's an adaptation, for hand

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use, of the big weapon they have discovered." He told them about the testing sites he had discovered. "Admiral Hatridge would give his heart's blood for one of those hand guns. If he had one of them as a model, he could tell the Roum he knew all about their secret weapon, and that they had better keep the peace, or else."

"But he doesn't have one," Jenkins said. "And the Roum do have a space ship."

"I know it."

Keeping carefully out of sight, they studied the scene before them. Roum were visible everywhere, tall, dusky-skinned Venusians in trim uniforms. Their features and their bodies were very close to the human, except for a sixth finger on each hand and a slight slanting of the eyes. As they worked, each carried the stubby little weapon that resembled a cross between a tommy-gun and a portable radar set. Parties were hard at work in the jungle, other Roum were examining the ship from the outside. Lights glowing from every port indicated the examination that was taking place inside the hull.

"I was thinking, if we had uniforms—" Balfour said hesitantly.

"I've had the same idea in my mind," Jenkins answered. "Come on. We'll see if we can borrow a couple of uniforms from a couple of Roum."

"What about me?" Lora Calhoun whispered.

"You stay right where you are," Balfour said. "We'll pick you up later." They left her hidden at the base of a gigantic tree. She didn't like it, but she didn't protest.

"Stout girl, that," Jenkins said, as they moved away.

"I agree," Balfour answered.

The first Roum, busy cutting branches to use for camouflage, never really knew what hit him. So far as he was concerned, an arm suddenly came from nowhere behind him, clamped around his neck and jerked him backward. He didn't even get a chance to notice that the hand on that arm was a monstrosity, that it held only five fingers.

"The uniform fits well enough," Balfour said. The cloth was some closely-woven water-resistant material. A leather belt holding a knife circled the waist. Balfour knew this was the death knife, by which the defeated fighter was supposed to take his own life. He was interested in the gun. The principle of operation he did not understand but there was an obvious safety and an obvious trigger. More than how to release the safety and pull the trigger he did not need to know. He slipped the uniform cap on his head, rubbed dirt on his hands and face.

"Now a nice new suit for me," Jenkins said.

The second Roum must have heard the approach of stealthy feet. He was nervous and very much alert. His wariness got him a chance to start a yell, which died in a strangled gasp as Balfour caught him in the crook of the arm and tightened the deadly hold around the neck. The warrior vanished into the jungle growth.

"You do that real neatly," Jenkins observed.

"It's part of my job to know how to kill a man—or a Roum—silently," Balfour answered. Between them they swiftly stripped the silenced warrior of his clothing.

"Our luck is good—so far," Jenkins said. He examined the gun, made certain he knew how to use it, slipped it in its sling.

Together, with no attempt at concealment, they stepped into the

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bright glare from the lights the Roum had strung up and moved directly toward the ship.

CHAPTER IV

SO FAR AS the Roum were concerned, it looked as if two of their warriors had come out of the jungle and were going definitely about their business. The warriors were in proper uniform, they carried their weapons properly, obviously they were Roum fighters. No one paid any attention to them. The Roum had not yet got around to checking the passenger and crew list against the dead bodies of the men they had slaughtered, hence they did not as yet know that any humans were missing.

The Roum were too excited to be wondering about such cattle as humans. They had what they wanted most—a space ship. When their scientists had finished examining the vessel, their hidden workshops would begin to hum with life, turning out long ships with which to range the star lanes. Because of the eternal cloud banks that covered Venus, they had never really appreciated the potentialities for conquest offered by the worlds beyond the sky. Most of them had never realized that some of the stars they saw occasionally were actually worlds like their own. They knew this fact now. To this race of fighters, the thought of new worlds to conquer was like a magic elixir, stirring them on to new ambitions. Peace was only for weaklings, was their motto.

The two warriors went directly to the stern of the ship, where they began to examine the hull. Since they seemed to know exactly what they were doing, they were obviously acting under orders. They stood looking up.

Jenkins sighed. There was real regret in that soft sound. "You've got to have a special wrench to open the damned lock over the filler pipes," he said.

"I see," Balfour said. "They've got a new type cover. The old ones simply screwed out. I had hoped that we could screw them loose, then perhaps a match—"

"Hey!" Jenkins said, startled. "If you dropped a match in those tanks, how in hell would you ever get away?"

"I hadn't thought of that," Balfour said.

The trader eyed him. "The hell you hadn't. You intended to unscrew that cap and then drop in a match. You crazy fool! I could think of a nicer way of committing suicide but I couldn't think of a faster one."

Balfour shrugged. "I would have given you a chance to get into the jungle first," he said. For a moment, he was silent. Then his voice came again. "I'll go into the ship and find the wrench. You stay here and act like you're busy."

"We'll go into the ship," Jenkins gently corrected him. "While you find the bench, I'll raid the electrician's kit for a couple of spools of wire, a high tension coil to produce a jump spark, and some batteries. We'll lay the wire into the jungle just exactly like we know what we're doing."

"Do you think we can get away with it?"

"We can try," Jenkins said. They moved to the lock.

THE ROUM had not posted guards as yet. Probably the need for guards would occur to them later, but at this moment, flushed with conquest, certain that all the humans

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were dead, they had seen no need for sentries. No one challenged the two warriors who stepped up into the lock and disappeared inside the ship. They parted at the place where the main passageways separated. Both the tool room and the electricians shop were at the stern of the ship but they were on opposite sides of the hull.

"Meet you at the filler pipe lock," Jenkins said. Balfour nodded.

The door of the tool room was open. Inside a single Roum was busy examining the ship's supply of tools. One by one, he was cataloguing them and entering the records, in neat script that looked like bird tracks, in a small note book. Balfour stepped inside and gently closed the door.

"*Vasose se?* Who are you?" the Roum growled.

"I was sent to help you," Balfour growled in reply. He knew enough of the language of the Go-roum to make himself understood. He hoped the occupant of this room would not notice his strange accent.

The Roum did notice it. "Your voice is strange," he spoke, rising to his feet.

"I have a throat pain," Balfour answered. "I want a special tool—"

In the rack across the room he saw the wrench for the lock over the filler caps. The human mechanic who had once used this room had cleaned the wrench and put it carefully in its place, against the day when it would again be needed. Balfour stepped forward and pulled it from its resting place.

"No one may take anything from this room," the Roum growled at him. "Those are my orders."

"Ah!" Balfour said. He swung the wrench. Made of steel, with a handle a foot long, it was a heavy tool. The projecting prong, designed to fit into the square opening of the small lock over the filler pipes, made its own opening—in the skull of the Roum.

Balfour wiped the stains from the wrench, slipped it inside the belt of his borrowed uniform. Gently, he closed the door as he went out. In the passageway no one challenged him. He dropped to the ground, still unchallenged, and moved directly to the stern.

For the first time, he dared to hope.

The lock was a steel cap. He fitted the wrench into the socket, began to turn. The block of steel turned easily under the pressure of the wrench. It came loose and sagged downward, held by a chain on the inside designed to keep it from dropping to the ground, revealing an opening about a foot in diameter. Visible now were the plain caps over the filler pipes.

The other end of the wrench fitted the socket in the filler pipe caps. He inserted the tool.

DIRECTLY above him, Roum were lifting long vines over the hull of the ship. Dim thunder was rumbling in the distance and rain had begun to fall in big drops. The Roum were swearing at the rain. The cap over the first filler pipe came off in his hands. He could smell the raw gases rising from the fuel inside the tanks.

Where was Jenkins? One of the tanks was open. One was enough. If one exploded, the others would go too. Balfour glanced toward the main lock. Jenkins was not in sight. He began to loose the cap from the second filler pipe.

The thunder growled closer and the rain grew stronger. Streaking downward through the light, each rain drop seemed as big as a golf

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ball. In this rain, in the growing storm, they would have an excellent chance to string wires into the jungle. Hope rose in him, stronger than before. Perhaps, after all, he was not a walking dead man! Perhaps he might live again! Perhaps, if he succeeded here, and Admiral Hatridge played his cards right in this grim game, a lot of people might live.

A shadow moved near him.

Startled, he jerked around.

Jenkins stood there. Jenkins was leaning against the hull of the ship.

"I didn't get—the wire—or the batteries—or the high tension coil!" Jenkins' words were spoken in a taut whisper.

"You didn't get—" Balfour broke off what he was going to say. The tone of the trader's voice warned him that something was wrong.

"I got a knife instead," Jenkins whispered. He pointed to his chest.

Dimly visible, protruding beyond the uniform, was the hilt of a Roum death knife. The blade was within or very close to the trader's heart.

"He saw—I only had five fingers," Jenkins whispered "He had the knife in me—before I knew he realized I wasn't a Roum." The voice faltered into silence, then came again. "I'm sorry—but I didn't get him. We won't have time to string the wire."

"You're dead, man!" Balfour gasped.

As if he had not heard him, Jenkins continued. "The whole ship is arousing, inside. Run, man! Get to Lora! Get away."

"Run?" Balfour whispered the single word. "But—"

"I know," Jenkins spoke. "You're thinking this job ought to blow. Well, it will blow! The pipes are open?" He raised himself to his full height, looked at the work Balfour had done. "Good!"

Lifting the weapon he had borrowed from the Roum warrior, he thrust the muzzle straight down the filler pipe.

"Any job a match will do, this little gadget ought to do better," he said.

Appalled, Balfour stared at him. "But—"

The trader's voice rose in a snarl. "There are no 'buts' about it. You would have done the same thing for me. I'm doing it for you. Run! you've got a chance, now, to get away."

From the main lock a shout sounded. A Roum warrior had dropped to the ground there. He was shouting a single word over and over again. "Spy! Spy! Spy!"

"Get moving!" Jenkins gasped.

"And leave you here?" Balfour spoke.

"You don't seem to understand," the trader answered. "I want it this way. I've got a knife in me. No matter what happens, I've only got a few minutes to live. There is no possible way I can escape, no possible way you can help me. All I've got is a choice of how I die. Let me go out in a blaze of glory."

BALFOUR made up his mind. If he were in Jenkins' place, he would demand the same privilege. He didn't say another word. For an instant their hands met, in the fierce grip of a final farewell, then Balfour turned and began to walk toward the edge of the jungle.

"Good luck," the trader's voice came after him. "I've got maybe five minutes. You had better be gone by then."

Balfour did not answer. All around him Roum warriors were moving toward the fighter standing on the ground outside the main lock. A whistle was blowing. The shrill notes

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of the call for assembly rang through the rain-soaked night.

Lighting rolled along the horizon. Thunder roared. To Balfour, knowing what might happen at any second, the walk through the flood lights to the edge of the jungle was the longest distance he had ever travelled in his life. A thousand needles of anticipatory dread jabbed at his back.

At any moment a Roum warrior might challenge. In answer to the assembly call, all the Roum were moving toward the ship. He, alone, was going in the opposite direction. Would he make the safety of the jungle? He didn't know. He was past all thinking, past all worrying about such a little thing as life, past all hoping. He reached the edge of the floodlights, slid into the jungle.

"Lora! Lora!"

In the illumination from a flash of lighting, he caught a glimpse of the tall tree where they had left her.

Her voice answered him. Oblivious now, of the fact that he might be detected, he ran toward her. He found her. Soaking wet from the pouring rain, she clung to him.

"Quick! Down behind the tree!"

She didn't ask any questions. With the bulk of the giant tree looming protectively over them, they threw themselves flat on the ground. "Cover your ears!" he said huskily.

Off in the distance, thunder rolled. From the direction of the ship came a fierce shout, the cry of a hunter who had located his prey. Balfour knew the meaning of this shout. Jenkins, leaning against the hull of the ship, had finally been detected.

Answering the shout, came a flash of fire. Following the flash of fire was a monstrous blast of thunder. At the ship the dying Jenkins had finally pulled the trigger of the Roum gun the muzzle of which was thrust down the filler pipes leading to the fuel tanks....

The very ground under them leaped convulsively. The air howled with sound. The tree above them bent far over from the rushing air fighting to get away from the explosion. The night was filled with chunks of flying metal. The whole jungle seemed saturated with this metallic rain.

It was the tree that saved John Balfour and Lora Calhoun. It bent double from the blast but it did not go over. The stout trunk protected them from the ghastly rain of redhot metal flying through the night.

Eventually the last chunk of metal had come back to the soil of Venus. John Balfour sat up. His ears ached from the fury of the explosion, his mind seemed to be reeling. In the spot where the space ship had rested a tremendous blaze was shooting flames a thousand feet into the air. All the fuel had not exploded. The remainder, burning there, was turning the broken hull of the ship into a mass of twisted, fused wreckage.

"We've got to start moving now," Balfour said. "Roum search parties will be all over this area. We've got to get out before they get here."

"What chance have we got?" she asked. "You said yourself the jungle cats—"

"One good thing I can say for the Roum," he answered. "They've got a weapon that will stop the biggest jungle cat that ever lived." He lifted the little weapon he carried.

Through the rainy, lightning swept and thunder harried night, she followed him away from the wreck of the burning ship. Jenkins, he put out of his mind. The jungle trader had died as he wished, a hero. Somewhere, someday, there would be a

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monument to Jenkins. Perhaps a monument would not be enough, but it would be something.

As for him, Balfour knew that again he dared to hope. Ten days and ten nights would be needed to reach the first trading post. From there, they could go forward in comparative security to final safety. The gun would protect them against the wild life, the jungle itself would provide them with everything they needed ....Well, perhaps not with everything. He thought of the yellow dress Lora Calhoun was wearing. Then he thought of the ten nights, nights with her warm softness very close to him. A smile struggled to existence on his face.... No, the jungle could not supply a yellow dress, or even a reasonable facsimile of same. It could only tear a yellow dress to shreds, revealing fully what lay beneath it.

On Balfour's face, the smile became a grin.....

THE END

IN THE DEEPS...

★ By Carter T. Wainwright ★

PTAR, PILOT-OFFICER of the Asian rocket submersible crouches in his cylindrical torpedoe of steel and shivers. It is chill in these waters off the Pacific Palisades. He shudders and turns the electric heater a little higher. His yellow skin is a pale lemon color from the cold. But Pilot-Officer Ptar endures the discomfort willingly.

Through his periscope, through his radar and ultra-sonic screens he watches the coast, patiently waiting for the tell tale throb of engines that will tell him that a big fat American freighter is coming along. Then Ptar will go into action.

He lights a precious half-cigarette and lets the blowers waft the smoke through the protruding miniature *Schnorkel* attached to the periscope. He lays quiescent, thinking and studying. The North Americans will have many surprises in store for them he reasons. Asia will triumph! In his mind's eye he sees the yelling crowds in Chungtang, the immobile, passive face of Kree-Than the Dictator of all the Asias. Ptar smiles to himself, a malevolent distortion of his lips.

Suddenly the ultra-sound detector begins to squeal. Ptar stretches his reclining body, reaches for the liquid tube and takes a draft of coffee spiked with a stimulant. He feels keen and alert. The tenseness vanishes. He knows he will be tired but when it is done he can rest before the next hunt.

The ultra-sound picks up the roar of the sea-going freighter's gas turbines before the vessel is visible. Then gradually it comes into Ptar's ken.

He swings the thirty foot submersible with electric motors, his rocket tubes silent. He knows he cannot be detected. He focuses the nose of the submersible upon the oncoming ship. His nostrils dilate. The kill is near!

Completely unaware the freighter plows the water at fifty knots, its powerful turbines creating an impressive howl. Ptar laughs exultantly. Hazily the English expression "like a sitting duck" drifts into his mind from some half-forgotten school class at the War College.

Ptar eases a little power to the motors. He will close in to be absolutely sure. He doesn't want the small atomic torpedoe to fail. He runs forward at three kilometers an hour. He raises his hand to reach over to the firing stud. He does it casually and confidently. The magnetic torpedoe *can't* miss, Ptar is the acme of confidence. He breathes a slight prayer of thanks to the gods and touches the stud...

Sub-lieutenant Carr looks off the larboard side of the bridge. He sees the sunlight glinting on a metallic object. His face grows white and he screams, "Sub to the larboard!"

Suddenly where his eye is watching erupts a column of water a thousand feet high. A thunderclap rolls over the sea. The ocean boils. Ptar is vapor along with his craft...

Crisply the message flashes from the Coastwatchers, a coded brief: "Anti-sub mine K-114-Z-11...tripped...telecam records enemy D-type sub..." —then more conversationally— "...knock one, boys... little sucker might have ripped a freighter...poor devil didn't have a chance... over..."

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HOLLYWOOD IN SPACE

By Leslie Phelps

WHEN THE space-ship eventually makes its appearance, as it is sure to do within the next fifty or a hundred years, the entertainment world is going to be faced with a problem. What sort of film can be one half so entertaining and thrilling as a direct telecast from the Moon, or a special interview with spacemen? Of course the answer, is nothing.

The world of the celluloid and sound will have to hustle some to make an impression. But knowing the energy found there, it is certain that Hollywood will meet the challenge.

Science-fiction has even anticipated this new Hollywood. Some years back, a series of stories were written in which the new Hollywood was located on the Moon and which conducted itself much as the Hollywood of today—only more glamourously.

Eventually the make-believe land will step in and fill the gap. We're sure of that. Right now, with all the sweeping success science-fiction has had and is having, with all the tremendous enthusiasm over books and plays with an s-f background, an awareness is found in Hollywood. The magnates out there are just beginning to realize the tremendous untapped gold mine that exists in the public desire to see good s-f films. We're not thinking of the corny horror and terror stuff that has been foisted upon us, but instead, of epic space adventures, of serious stories like the ones you are reading here.

It is a good omen that Hollywood is looking around for such stories to do. It may require a whole new approach. It may require unusual technological facilities since we can't yet go to the Moon, but this is merely a minor detail. The boys out West will find the answers.

Putting s-f on film will be like adding a third dimension. Instead of much of the pallid tasteless diet we've been getting, we'll really have a chance to see imagination at work. Your editors would sell their souls to see a faked trip to the Moon, suitably interwoven with a plot, and presented with all the fire and power that Hollywood is capable of when it wants to be.

Hold your hats. It's coming and soon. There are too many s-f readers now. They can't laugh at our demands. Nor do we think they want to!

BUILDING BLOCKS

By Milton Matthew

IT WAS five hundred million years after the world had been a warm and vibrant planet, and the feeble sun that now warmed it was a dying ember, slowly radiating away its substance into the freezing reaches of outer space.

Kuz, the archeologist, strained his feeble muscles within his warm and heated metal-suit, and tugged harder on the buried object. He grunted exultantly as it came free.

"Here, Maze!" he screamed, "I've found another block. It's made of lead too!"

His companion stumbled across the dusty plain to his side and stared with amazement through his visi-port. "Another one!" he breathed incredulously. "The academy of Science will be amazed. We'll soon be able to re-construct an entire dwelling!"

Kuz rested from his labors and sat down beside the square leaden block. He shook his head.

"I can't understand what manner of people these ancestors of ours were. Why did they use lead in their buildings? What was the purpose? The blocks survive a half a billion years. They show a high degree of technological skill. But of all the metals to use, why lead?"

Maze settled beside him and nudged the block with metal-boot encased toe. His foot stirred up a whirl of dust. The dull sun started to settle below the horizon.

"Do you believe Gzano's Hypothesis?" he asked finally.

Kuz threw back his little head and a gust of laughter shook him. "Don't be funny," he gasped after a moment, "There were no such things as radioactive storms! Do you honestly think people protected themselves against storms with walls of lead?"

Grudgingly Maze admitted his error: "No, I don't, but remember, we always detect a little radioactivity with the lead."

Abruptly Kuz arose and picked up the leaden block. "Let's get back to the 'coptor," he said. "Let's just admit that the ways of our ancestors were beyond us—what noble people they must have been!"

The thin air whistled around them and the two archeologists shivered in their insulated suits. And as it keened around the scientists, a hundred million ghosts sighed with it—but the unsounded words "atomic war", were never imagined, much less heard...

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NULL F

by PETER WORTH

A person can be known for his sense of humor — and so also can an era. Take, for an example, the world a hundred years from now!

"CHILDREN!" Mrs. Barnes said admonishingly. She waited until her four offspring quieted down, then turned to her husband who was carving the roast with expert, efficient flourishes. "Oh, John. Are you SURE you will be all right? It seems so—so dangerous."

"Nonsense, mother," Dr. Barnes said. "It will be no more dangerous than—than going down town. After all, what is there to fear? You've seen what we have—the motion picture that showed buildings still standing and obviously kept in repair, people obviously still civilized. The cage of white mice that went with the camera came back no worse for their experience. Surely such things prove there is no danger."

His serious, dignified face turned to regard her admonishingly.

"I know," Mrs. Barnes sighed. "But I can't help worrying. You know how upset you get when things don't go as they should."

"That's different," Dr. Barnes said, laying the carving knife down carefully and starting to dish up the first plate. "You certainly aren't trying to place the minor irritations of life on a par with Adventure. Ha-ha. It's utterly silly to insist that because a man can't tolerate a careless waitress spilling soup all over his clothes he is unsuited for adventure."

He dropped a spoonful of mashed potatoes on the plate emphatically to punctutate his remark, and handed the plate to his eldest son, who started it around to its final destination, Mrs. Barnes' place.

"That isn't what I meant, John," Mrs. Barnes said patiently, "It's—well you're so DIGNIFIED. You are protected by your reputation and position."

"What makes you think I am not equally protected a hundred years in the future?" Dr. Barnes replied. "Surely this projected journey into time is already recorded there. I don't doubt but what even the time and place is well known, so that there will be a select group of scientists waiting for me to arrive!"

"You really think so, pop?" the youngest spoke up. "Gee. How could they find out? You haven't made the trip yet."

Dr. Barnes frowned affectionately at his youngest.

"In the time to which I an going," he said. "What I am GOING to do this evening at the Institute took place a century ago."

There was deep silence at the table while Dr. Barnes continued dish-

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The man stepped out of the peculiar looking metal globe and stood pointing a weapon. He fired it—and a stream of water shot out! . . .

ing up plates for his assembled family. This was broken finally by Mrs. Barnes who said:

"Just the same, I won't stop worrying until you get safely back. Why don't they just take the word of the camera and let it go at that? Surely there's no need of sending YOU on a hazardous journey into the future. They could have picked a younger man."

"I insisted on taking the risk myself, dear," he answered with grave dignity. "The captain of the ship can ask no member of the crew to take risks he himself would shun."

"Gee," the youngest spoke up excitedly. "I didn't know you were a captain. I thought you always got seasick on the water."

"That was just a figure of speech, Ronald," Dr. Barnes said gently.

"Oh," the youngest said. His face lit up with a thought. "Maybe you'll get seasick on this trip, pop. Maybe there's a lot of rocking that the white mice and the camera didn't show, huh?"

"Nonsense!" Dr. Barnes said sharply; but his color turned slightly green at the thought.

"Oh, dear," Mrs. Barnes said. "I'll go up right now before I forget it and put your seasickness medicine in your overnight bag. You be sure and have it ready to take just in case, John."

She hastened upstairs while Dr. Barnes continued serving, his lips compressed into grim lines of determination.

"HOW OLD is Dr. Barnes?" the reporter asked.

"Fifty-four," Dr. Walters answered.

"Fifty-four?" the reporter echoed. "Isn't that a bit old for a dangerous journey into the future? Why didn't they pick a younger man? For that matter, why is only ONE going? Why not a small party, armed to the teeth in preparation for anything?"

"Dr. Barnes is in charge of this project," Dr. Walters said with a tinge of bitterness faintly concealed in his tone. "He decided to make the first trip himself. After all, there is no danger involved."

"How about the inventor of the time-field—George Blithewell is his name, isn't it?"

"Blithwell did not discover the time-field," Dr. Walters said icily. "He merely stumbled onto an unexplainable phenomenon. It was the research department here at the Institute that determined what he had accidentally found was indeed a time field."

"Oh, I see," the reporter said shrewdly. "Blithewell discovered a field. You scientists discovered that it was a time-field."

"That is correct," Dr. Walters said, smiling frigidly. "I might add that Blithewell STILL does not fully comprehend the mathematics that prove the nature of his accidental discovery. So very little credit is due him for his apparent discovery; especially because of the fact that modern trends in research would have uncovered it in a short time in any case. The equations of Schoupovski and Kramcoughskovitch by a simple parametric transposition and integration, with, of course, the substitution of the Einsteinian Field Equation in place of the integration constant lead, by an Abelian Group operation, to the first of the fourteen basic equations for the time field. It was merely a question of time before someone would have done this."

"Oh, I see," the reporter said vaguely. "Uh—do you have anything to say about Senator Crang's charges that the Institute is trying to squeeze Blithewell out—"

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"There is nothing to those charges," Dr. Walters said heatedly. "I've just explained that Blithewell had practically less than nothing to do with the actual creation of the time machine. One might just as fairly claim that a science fiction writer invented the atom bomb, since several of them described its effects with surprising accuracy years before the bomb itself."

"I see," the reporter said absently, jotting down a few notes. He glanced at his wristwatch. "Isn't it about time for Dr. Barnes to show up?"

"Here he is now," Dr. Walters said, moving away with evident relief.

Dr. Barnes had paused dramatically at the entrance to the large room. When every head had turned in his direction he began moving with dignified stride down an aisle between the two blocks of camp chairs brought in to seat all those who had been permitted to view the historic undertaking.

HIS EYES were squinted against the glare of the winking flash cameras. His shoulders were squared manfully, carrying with graceful form the well tailored tweed coat of the suit he had bought for this special occasion. His graying hair was combed back statesmanlike. His features carried the selfsatisfaction of a man who has seen himself in the mirror and knows that every picture taken will do him credit.

"Dr. Barnes!" the reporter called, trying to overtake him. "Hold up a minute. I'm a reporter. Have you anything to tell the press before embarking on your voyage?"

Dr. Barnes winced at the reminder of his weakness for seasickness, recovered, and waited benignly for the reporter to catch up with him.

"Why, yes," he said. "I suppose I should have something to say for the press. You might put down that I am looking forward to this experiment with great confidence that it will mark a milestone in the progress of science."

"O.K.," the reporter said, dropping behind. On his notepad he added in brackets, (Famous last words.)

Dr. John Barnes was still thrilling to the applause that had been given him as he stepped into the time machine when the intricate workings of that device silenced, and the door opened onto the world of June third, twenty forty-nine. He sighed deeply with relief at the realization that the trip had been without sensation, and carefully returned the seasickness remedy to his overnight bag.

Hesitating only for an imperceptible instant, he stepped boldly from the time machine onto the smoothly cropped lawn outside. Frowning his puzzlement at the absence of a welcoming committee, he made sure the time machine was still visible, then started walking across the lawn to what seemed to be a paved path a hundred yards away, casually swinging his overnight bag at his side.

In the distance, beyond the path, loomed buildings. Some of them were recognizable as being those that had actually been built before 1949. Others were of strange architecture, proving they had been erected since then.

Reaching the paved path he paused to firmly fix landmarks in his mind. He looked back once to see the time machine still resting on the lawn, its door open. However the key to its controls was in his pocket, so there was no danger of someone running off with the machine.

To the right the path seemed to curve further into the park. To the left it seemed to curve gradually to-

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ward the buildings, though shrubbery quickly blocked off the view of the path.

As he began walking Dr. Barnes felt a vague disappointment. So far it had not been any different than walking in any public park back in 1949, except for the absence of people. Where were the people?

As if in answer to his unvoiced question a man appeared ahead walking toward him. He was wearing loose shorts and a long sleeved, double-breasted sport jacket, both of bright orange.

Feeling quite excited over this impending meeting with a man of the future, Dr. Barnes studied his appearance carefully. He was of medium height, appeared about twenty-five years of age, with a tanned complexion and regular features. He could have been strolling along a park of 1949 without attracting attention in any way.

AS HE CAME near Dr. Barnes stopped, a pleasant smile of anticipation on his face, his hand extended for a handshake. It was still extended when the man of the future passed him; but the smile was being replaced by surprised discomfiture.

The next instant Dr. Barnes felt something strike the back of his neck and trickle down under his collar.

He turned. The man of the future was calmly returning a small black gun to a pocket inside his doublebreasted sportshirt. He was looking at Dr. Barnes without expression.

Dr. Barnes, his mind frozen with the possible implications of the gun, wiped the back of his neck with his hand and brought it slowly around to where he could see it. The fluid was—not blood, but something colorless. He cautiously tasted it. It seemed to be water.

The man of the future, still without facial expression, turned and continued on his way. Dr. Barnes watched him, a wondering, dazed look on his face.

"If it weren't an utter absurdity," he said to himself. "I would swear that man shot a water pistol at me."

A trifle shaken by this unorthodox experience, Dr. Barnes continued on down the path, deciding to seek further rather than chase after this first person—who seemed more worth avoiding than cultivating.

Ahead something seemed to be laying across the walk. Advancing cautiously, Dr. Barnes saw that it was a fine string of some sort of plastic, its ends out of sight in the bushes on both sides of the walk.

Just inside the concealment of the bushes where the string vanished were two men, very much like the first had been in appearance. Each was squatted down, one hand holding an end of the string.

"Amazing!" Dr. Barnes said to himself. "These grown men seemed as if they were planning on jerking this string and tripping me—but of course that is absurd. There must be something more to this than what there is on the surface."

He took another step as if about to step across the string. Instantly the two men drew it taught, six inches above the walk.

Dr. Barnes stepped over it. The two men of the future, their faces revealing no expression, dropped the string on the walk again.

"Just what is this?" Dr. Barnes asked curiously.

As if in answer, one of the men drew a gun out of his shirt and calmly squirted a stream of water in Dr. Barnes' face.

Dr. Barnes calmly took his hand-

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kerchief from its pocket and wiped off the water. Inside him was a vague alarm. Could this be perhaps the grounds of a hospital for the mentally ill?

Returning his handkerchief to his pocket he took a firmer grip on his overnight bag and continued along the walk. He looked back after he had gone a few yards. The string lay slack on the walk. It was too far away to see the two men in the concealment of the bushes.

Shrugging, he continued walking.

HE HAD taken only a few more steps when a running figure suddenly came into view. It was a young lady, dressed almost the same as the three men he had seen. Behind her was a fourth man, apparently chasing her.

She brushed past Dr. Barnes without giving any evidence of having seen him. The man did the same. Dr. Barnes turned to watch them.

Shrugging, he continued walking. across the walk. He watched with renewed interest as the young woman came to it. It remained slack on the walk when she ran over it, then drew taut as the pursuer came to it, tripping him neatly.

The victim was still flying forward in a sprawl as one of the concealed young men sprang into view and ran after the girl.

The one who had tripped on the string stood up, looked after the departing pair, and took the place of the one who had sprung from the bushes.

"Well, I'll be—" Dr. Barnes muttered aloud. He shook his head slowly and continued on his way.

The walk came to a bridge that arched over a small pond upon which ducks and swans were floating lazily. At the other side of the pond the path entered on a sidewalk at a three way street intersection.

With a cluck of satisfaction Dr. Barnes hastened his steps—with a wary eye out for strings across the walk, and whatever else might appear unexpectedly. He wondered briefly at the absence of a fence here at the edge of what he was now firmly convinced was the grounds of a hospital for the mentally unbalanced.

There were no cars in sight. In fact, there were none parked at the curb in any direction. There were, however, plenty of people. Most of them were dressed in loose shorts and double-breasted sportshirts, both men and women.

They were walking busily along, intent on their own affairs, just as any street crowd in 1949 would be.

Dr. Barnes joined them, beginning to wonder just how he was going to breach the subject of his recent arrival on the future, and to whom.

Would it be best to just stop someone and say, "Pardon me, sir; but I just arrived from the year 1949. I don't intend to stay more than a few hours, and would like to be noticed a bit before I return to the past."

He was suddenly shocked out of his deep concentration on the problem by a cascade of the now familiar stream of water from a water pistol. He blinked it out of his eyes and stared at the comely young lady who was casually replacing the gun inside her blouse.

"My dear young lady," he said, making no effort to keep the irritation out of his voice. "Was that really necessary?"

At once a crowd gathered. A notepad and pencil appeared in the young lady's hand. She began getting people to sign it, saying to each, "Did you hear what he said?

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Did you notice the irritation in his tone?"

Each nodded grimly and eagerly wrote on the paper. While Dr. Barnes watched this with a feeling that something distinctly over his head was going on, a policeman materialized through the crowd.

"What's your name, sir?" he asked politely.

"Dr. Barnes, Dr. John Barnes." Dr. Barnes' eyes lit up. This was the chance he had been hoping for. "I'm Dean of the Eastern Research Institute. I've just arrived from the year 1949 in a time machine."

"Excellent, sir," the policeman said politely. "But why should one of your apparent skill," he glanced admiringly at the tweed suit as he spoke, "breach the peace so clumsily?"

HE WROTE on a slip of paper, tore it from the pad he held in his hand, and handed it to Dr. Barnes. He gave the carbon to the young lady and carefully placed the carbon sheet between the next two sheets of his book.

Dr. Barnes read his slip of paper and saw it was a summons to appear in court. He looked up indignantly, to see that the crowd, the young lady who had squirted him, and the policeman were gone. People were streaming past him unconcernedly.

He half turned, starting to obey an impulse to return to the Time machine and escape. But ahead was a sign that denoted a cafe. That, and the realization that no one in 1949 would believe anything he could tell of his experiences, decided him to stay awhile longer.

Bracing his shoulders, he started walking again. Slowly he became aware that someone was keeping pace with him. It was a young man who seemed no different than the others.

"I'll bite," the young man said.

"You'll bite?" Dr. Barnes echoed. A fierce joy appeared on his face. "Tricks," he thought. "Let's see how he likes THIS one." Then, aloud. "You'll bite. Fine. I'll join you in a bite. I'm a bit hungry myself." And he watched the young man out of the corner of his eye to see his reaction.

"Thank you," was the reply. "It's very generous of you."

Feeling slightly deflated, Dr. Barnes led the way into the cafe.

"Look," the young man said when they were seated. "Were you serious out there about being from 1949? It's just possible, you know."

Dr. Barnes jerked his eyes away from the spectacle of a customer tripping a waiter with a tray full of food.

"What?" he asked. "Oh. Yes, certainly. I'm from 1949 all right. I haven't been here more than fifteen minutes, and so far I can't understand anything of what I've seen. I suppose it makes sense—in a way; but what that sense is I can't figure out."

A waiter set a cup of coffee in front of Dr. Barnes and the young man. The young man promptly placed the end of a water pistol in it and pulled back a pin. Most of the coffee vanished into the pistol. He then proceeded to drink the rest, his face calmly expressionless.

Dr. Barnes raised his cup to his lips and cautiously tasted the beverage. It was hot coffee—loaded with salt.

"Phew!" he said disgustedly, spitting it out.

"You saw that?" the waiter said to the young man, jerking out a notepad and extending it with a pencil. The young man nodded gravely and signed a name on the paper.

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Dr. Barnes, an angry glint in his eye, gave the waiter a vicious kick in the shin. The waiter had just taken the pad from the young man. He dropped it and s h o u t e d, "OUCH!"

"You heard that?" Dr. Barnes said gravely, taking his own n o t e p a d from the breast pocket of his coat and handing it to the young man, along with his fountain pen.

"You know," the young man said calmly, ignoring the pad. "I'm beginning to believe you ARE from 1949. What you have just done is a capital offense, and no one in their right mind would have done such a thing deliberately."

"Capital offense?" Dr. B a r n e s said, half rising. "Then what in the —the wide blue yonder are all the tricks that have been played on ME? Social amenities?"

"Right," the young man said calmly. "And that's the reason I'm so sure you are kidding me when you insist you are from 1949."

"Let's put off questions about my veracity until after we've had something to eat," Dr. Barnes said. He fixed the waiter with a fierce, threatening gaze. "Do you suppose you could bring me—us, something fit to eat—with no soap or other tricky stuff concealed in it? Something that tastes good and that I can relax and enjoy eating without wondering if the next bite is loaded with pepper?"

THE WAITER, still nursing his ankle, looking questioningly at the young man, who nodded imperceptibly.

"Yes, sir," he said. He limped away. Dr. Barnes watched him go, a satisfied gleam in his eyes, then turned back to the young man.

"Now, young man," he said. "I wonder if you'd answer a few questions for me?"

"Of course," the young man replied.

Dr. Barnes took a deep breath.

"Why did that young lady squirt water on me?" he began. "Why did the waiter serve me coffee with salt in it—when yours was all right? And why did you fill a squirt gun with your coffee like you did?"

"To squirt you with, of course," the young man said. He calmly took out his gun and squirted its entire contents in Dr. Barnes' face.

Dr. Barnes took out his handkerchief and wiped the coffee off his face. His hands were shaking from the effort at self c o n t r o l. He watched the young man during the process. The young man looked back at him with studied indifference.

With his face fairly dry, Dr. Barnes put his handkerchief back in his pocket.

"You answered my last question first," he said, his voice very quiet. "Now, how about the first one. Why did the young lady squirt water on me?"

"I'll answer your second question next," the young man said. "My coffee had salt in it too. For the first question, the young lady either thought she knew you, or she wanted to get acquainted with you. You should have felt complimented." He leaned forward, evidently warming up to his subject. "The salt in the coffee is a specialty of this cafe—though of course it is more or less of a standard welcome in most of the lower class cafes such as this one. It was the waiter's way of welcoming you."

"I see," Dr. Barnes said grimly. "Sort of a practical joke to make me feel at home."

"That's right," the young man said. For the first time he smiled. "My name is Joe Cartwright," he said, extending his hand.

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Mrs. Barnes and her four children occupied the five seats closest to the platform where the time machine would re-appear. Next to her sat the reporter, his notebook still in his hand.

Farther on in the front row the Institute scientists sat nervously, impatient for the time machine to come back. The several hundred other people in the large room were talking together in low voices that created a humming effect in the atmosphere.

Photographers stood about uncomfortably, their cameras ready for the first hazy materialization of the machine. And on a raised platform at the rear of the room a television camera was running, directed at the spot where all eyes centered.

"Now, now, Mrs. Barnes," the reporter said consolingly. "You musn't worry so much. Nothing can happen to your husband. People of the future are just as civilized as we are. No doubt Dr. Barnes is being feted and given the keys to the city, and all sorts of honors."

"But I can't help worrying," Mrs. Barnes said. "Suppose it was—will be—that is, suppose it's raining when he steps out of the machine. I forgot to make him take his rubbers. And suppose," a new horror dawned on her face, "suppose he catches some new disease that we don't know anything about now? John is SO susceptible to colds and diseases."

"Boy, have you got a worry bug," the reporter said admiringly. "My wife should take lessons from you!"

MRS. BARNES opened her mouth to retort. But suddenly she, and all the rest, forgot everything. A hazy shape was taking form on the platform. It was the time machine returning! Photoflash bulbs were going off like mad. The reporter's fingers became a blur of motion as he jotted down his impressions.

Mrs. Barnes twisted her fingers in a frenzy of anxiety. Her four offspring chewed gum rapidly, their eyes large and round. Everyone else seemed paralyzed.

The machine became solid. No one was breathing as the door slowly opened. No one breathed for a space of ten seconds after it opened.

Dr. Barnes stepped out. He was wearing a pair of loose yellow trunks that revealed hairy, stocky legs, discolored here and there by blue network of veins. The yellow, double-breasted sportshirt definitely looked better on him than the tweed coat that he had been wearing had looked.

The strange sound of a hundred people taking a deep breath went unheard in the intensity of the moment. Gasps were silently exploding everywhere.

Dr. Barnes stepped forward to the edge of the platform slowly. His face was completely expressionless, his eyes calm. He wiggled the blunt black pistol in his hand in a menacing manner.

"Mother! Children!" he said brittley. "Come up here. Get in the time machine."

"John!" Mrs. Barnes gasped.

"Better do as he says," the reporter said in a low voice. "He's mad."

"Y-y-y-yes, John," Mrs. Barnes said. "Do as your father says, children."

The five of them trailed past Dr. Barnes and stepped into the time machine.

"Is pop crazy, mom?" the youngest asked loudly.

Dr. Barnes retreated toward the door of the time machine. His eyes darted here and there, warily.

"He's insane!" the reporter shout-

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ed. "Rush him. He can't get all of us before we down him!"

Suiting his action to his words he darted forward, his eyes on the knuckle of Dr. Barnes' finger curled around the trigger.

He saw that finger whiten, and the gun turn toward him. He launched himself in a long low dive. He felt no pain—only the warm sticky wetness that covered his neck and trickled down. He lay there, feeling it trickle toward his mouth.

He tasted it. It was salt to the taste—like blood. Later—much later, he swore he hadn't fainted; but by that time Dr. Barnes was introducing his family to the delightful customs of the twenty-first century.

"Customs," he was saying. "That outrage the 1949 sense of dignity as much as those of 1949 would offend the 1849 sense of dignity—but very soul-satisfying once you get onto them."

THE END

TELERAPPORT

★ By J. R. Marks ★

"WHAT ARE you staring at, dear?" Blair jerked erect. There were tiny beads of sweat on his forehead. He looked at his wife a little angrily. He glanced around the apartment, his eyes taking in its hyper-modern appearance as though it were new.

"I wish you wouldn't interrupt like that, Cyrisse," he said slowly. He shook his head and passed his hand before his eyes. "I was just in *telerapport* with the Singapore office. You know how tough that is. Keeping a line over four thousand miles isn't easy, even if Johnson in Seattle boosted my index a bit."

"I'm sorry," his wife said sympathetically, "but you should have told me."

Blair went over to his wife and put his arm around her shoulders.

"I'm sorry I snapped that way," he said. "I'll use the video tomorrow. I'm tired anyway. It was just a casual pulse which started the link. I'll have to stop that. Bad habit." They smiled at each other...

That fantastic conversation may be commonplace in the future if what Dr. Rhine is saying is really true, and we have no reason to think otherwise. That telepathy can take place and over enormous distance seems to be a fact. It has definitely occurred in the past. Perhaps it can be developed to the stage where it can be used for business and industry.

Even now however we suspect that it can be a pretty rugged drain on human energy. We know thought is a fatiguing practice. This extension of thought must be worse.

Even if telepathy or the art of being telerapport never goes beyond definite limits, it will be a valuable faculty. How often have you tried to explain something in words without making the point? Think how easy it would be if you could permit your student to peek into your mind...

BOOK WORM

★ A. Morris ★

THE COUNCIL of Science, aware of the dangers of interplanetary warfare has now a movement afoot, to reproduce the master-library at numerous points throughout the world. This is a good idea for the master-library is not as impressive physically as it may be imagined by most of us. Just because we can tap the videophone and have any volume we choose at our finger-tips, played before us from microfilm, doesn't mean that the physical size of the master library is great.

As a matter of fact, the six hundred million different volumes are housed in a rather unimpressive building in Washtone. Of course the interior is a miracle of electronics and photo-technique, but then we are accustomed to vastly greater miracles. The thrilling thing about the master-library is that it effectively houses the sum total of human knowledge as it has been inscribed. There is nothing that has been written in any language that is not available. And it is being added to at the rate of more than ten million volumes per year! We use the word volume, meaning of course "microfilm-volume".

The Martian threat, meaning as it does, the possible extinguishment of all that we know of civilization on both worlds, means that we must take steps to see that the storehouse of human knowledge is not too greatly endangered.

For this purpose numerous duplicates of the master-library are being constructed. It is said that the most recent one has been built three hundred miles beneath the crust of this old planet, certainly an excellent protection! Nothing less than a planet-splitter among atomic bombs would be able to destroy it.

It is a hideous thought to think that one day man might be forced to dig himself from the rubble and begin all over again. But the master-libraries will be a great comfort should such horror ever occur.

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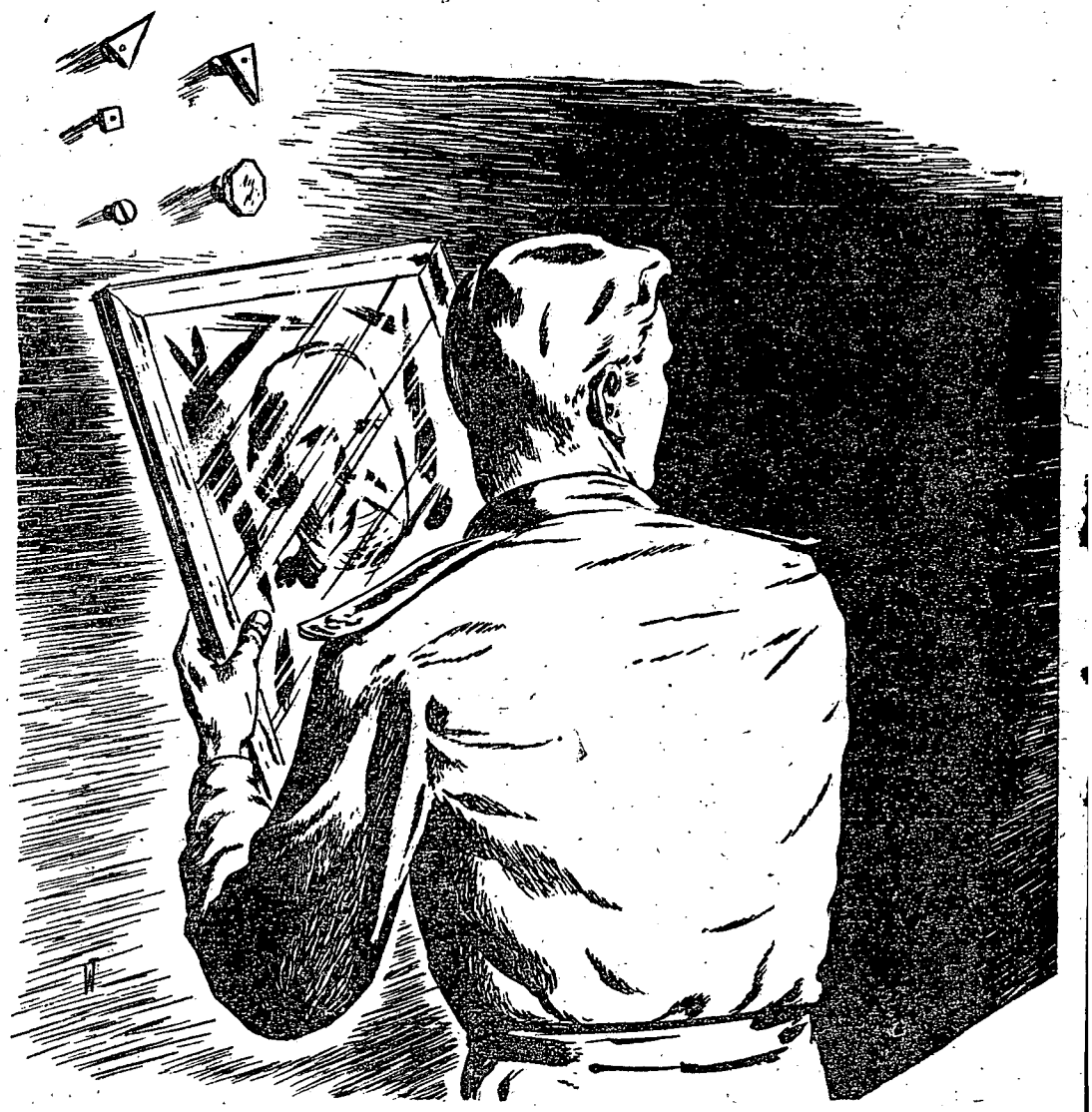

MYSTERY on PLUTO

by WARD FLEMING

Frank Grove's mining business on Pluto was in danger of being ruined. And it was up to Nick Anders to find out the reason why . . .

Nick had removed the picture from the wall and was staring at the strange knobs behind it when he heard someone enter the room . . .

"SOMEONE among you here is stealing faltronium!" Old Frank Grove looked slowly from one to the other of the fourteen men gathered before him in the brightly-lit dining room of Interstellar Mining Company's plant on Pluto. His wrinkled face, usually wearing an expression of humor, was twisted with bitterness. A deep hurt had replaced the twinkle in his eyes.

From the group of men arose exclamations of astonishment, and each looked at his neighbor in shocked incredulity. They had known that something was wrong when the grey-haired superintendent summoned them to this meeting. But none had guessed that anything so serious would be in the offing.

Grove raised a hand for silence. Almost wearily he continued: "It's true. During the last few months our production of the element has been falling off. Since I am in charge of operations here, and therefore responsible for maximum production, I found it necessary to determine the exact cause of this deficiency. After a thorough check-up of every step of the process through which the element goes, I found nothing wrong. But somehow or other, small quantities of the element have been disappearing. This can only mean that it has been stolen. One of you men here —someone I trusted—is responsible!"

Grove swept the faces before him with pain-filled accusing eyes.

Nick Anders shook his head slowly, a puzzled frown upon his clean-lined face. It was hard to believe that one of the men present was a thief. And even more difficult to believe was the fact that faltronium had been stolen steadily over a two-month period. Why, it was impossible! Every bit of the element was accounted for from the time it was wrested from Pluto's frozen interior to the time it was refined in the laboratory.

Nick covertly surveyed the men standing about him. There were his fellow laboratory technicians, Rod Boldt, and Guglo Atska. Boldt was leaning against the back of a chair, his dark face sober for once. With a feeling of disgust, Nick noticed that his eyes were fixed upon the face of Ann Grove, the old superintendent's pretty daughter.

Boldt's immobility suddenly gave

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way to a wracking cough. Nick eyed him wonderingly. He had spoken to Boldt about that cough, advised him to see the doctor when the supply ship came in. But Boldt had laughed his counsel off, and Nick in resentment had not mentioned it again.

Wizened little Guglo Atska, the Martian who comprised the third member of the laboratory staff—the test-tube trio, as Ann laughingly called them—was staring intently at the floor, while he pulled at his thin, black beard. The eight miners who braved Pluto's interstellar cold to mine the precious faltronium ore were huddled together in a stolid, patient group. Their two foremen—one for each shift—stood near them, eyeing their respective men calculatingly. Hans, the fat Europian cook, tried to appear unconcerned, but he twisted his plump hands and blinked his eyes as if the cold finger of suspicion were surely levelled at him. In spite of the gravity of the moment, Nick could not help grinning.

"These thefts," Grove resumed grimly, "must stop! You all know how rare the metal is and how badly our government needs it now in the war. Only the lowest of men would steal faltronium for private gain, knowing the urgency of this need. The future progress of the Solar System depends upon keeping the unscrupulous Venerian monarchy from coming back into power.

"All I'm going to ask is that these thefts cease. There will be no investigation. I'll try to double our output to cover the loss. If the thief has a spark of decency left in him, he'll make full restitution. But if the thefts continue, I'll turn this plant inside out to find the culprit and bring him to Justice!" Grove paused to let the force of his words sink in. Then he turned and walked swiftly from the room.

The old superintendent's words seemed to leave a black cloud of distrust hanging over the room behind them. The men stood about in silent unease. But the common desire to air opinions at last drew them together, and slowly small groups gathered to discuss the situation.

Nick started toward Ann Grove, but Boldt had already reached her side and was speaking gesturing animatedly. Nick glared at the other, muttered under his breath, and stalked to his room. Under his breath he cursed the day Rod Boldt was born. If it wasn't for that pest, he thought bitterly, he'd have more of a chance with the girl. Boldt's rivalry was keen.

Thought of Ann always made Nick go soft inside. She was gay and charming, yet serious, and desperately loyal to anyone she loved. She was content to spend her days on desolate Pluto, gladly shouldering an innumerable assortment of minor tasks just to be with her father. Like faltronium, she was a rarity, the kind of girl that would make a splended wife.

IN HIS tiny room Nick undressed and stretched out upon the bed. He mentally reviewed the events of the last several minutes. Some unknown person was stealing faltronium—stealing it so cleverly that more than two months had passed before the loss was discovered. Who, Nick wondered, was that person?

The miners were clearly out, for they lacked the ingenuity which the thefts demanded. Besides, their foreman kept an eagle eye upon them while they worked, and they would have very little opportunity to hide any of the ore they mined. Even if they did, they would have to hide away tons, since it took approximately a ton of ore to make a bar of faltronium.

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The two foremen were out for exactly the same reason. Frank Grove's honesty was not to be doubted. As superintendent of the plant, he would be hurting himself by stealing the element. Ann, too, was in the clear, for she seldom if ever came near faltronium, either in the labortory or in the mines. And Hans? Nick smiled in the darkness. The fat little Europian would give himself away immediately even if he had stolen so much as a speck of faltronium.

There remained only the men who refined the ore in the laboratory—Atska, Boldt, and Nick himself. The technicians were the only ones who came near faltronium in its pure form. Atska was a furtive, queer old gnome who spoke only when absolutely necessary. If anyone was the thief, Nick felt that the little Martian would be the most likely.

But again there remained the fact that it would be difficult if not impossible for Atska to steal any faltronium. His task was to operate the massive pulverizing machine which crushed the ore as it came from the mines. The element was closely mingled in the resulting gravel, and was therefore very difficult to extract. Atska, naturally, could not spend all his time picking minute grains of faltronium from the gravel.

Boldt? Almost fervently Nick wished that Boldt were the thief. Then, he thought wistfully, he'd have Ann all for himself. But Boldt couldn't be, for like Atska he came near faltronium only in gravel form. His job was to spread the gravel upon a long metal pan, which was inserted into a sealed electric oven and heated. Faltronium became a heavy vapor at fifty-four degrees Centigrade, thus allowing it to be easily separated from its rock and silica composite.

Nick operated the condensation unit which cooled the vapor and formed it into small rectangular bars. Grove then tested the bars for purity, weighed them, and locked them in a safe. Thus, from the first to the last steps of its production, faltronium was practically impossible to steal.

Nick shook his head. Could Grove be mistaken? But the old man knew his business—if he said faltronium was being stolen, it was being stolen. But how? How?

Faltronium, as he knew, was used primarily as a catalyst to accelerate the reaction in the Gerelli-Stevenson, rocket engines, which were the most economical and powerful yet devised. No other element was as effective. It had originally been discovered on Titan and after some experimentation, had been added to the list of known elements. Succeeding search had unearthed it on a few other out-lying planets and their moons. But the largest deposits yet discovered were on Pluto. These were owned by the famous Interstellar Mining Company.

Because of Faltronium's scarcity it was easy to understand why stealing even the smallest quantity of it was a serious crime. Only radium of the last century had been as valuable and as rare.

Use of the element was now under subsidy to the United Earth government in its war to prevent a resumption of the Ziractyul regime which had been one of the most blood-thirsty and tyrannical ever known. If such a government came back into power the future welfare of the entire Solar System would be menaced. Consequently, every tiniest bit of faltronium was needed now more than ever before.

THE WEEKS following old Grove's startling declaration were ones of unnaturalness and strain. Black suspicion had permeated the

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little group of cubical metal buildings on Pluto. There was watching, sly and incessant watching.

Nick, who felt positive that faltronium could only be stolen from the laboratory, kept a close, though apparently casual, eye upon the activities of his fellow technicians, Atska and Boldt. But everything went on as usual, and nothing of any special significance took place. Boldt's cough seemed to have improved.

At the end of one dinner period the old superintendent stood up to address the men. There were new lines in his face, and his manner was cold and grim.

"I have just received a special radio message from America on Earth," he announced. "We are being asked to double our output. From reading between the lines of the message, I gather that the war is swinging in the favor of the Venerians. America is entirely alone in her fight, for the United States of Europe are still smarting over her decision in the partition of the Martian redlands. The other countries are busy with troubles in their own colonies.

"Therefore I want to ask that a full return of the stolen faltronium be made. Our ships and guns need it badly to win the war. The safety of every colonist and miner in the Solar System depends upon bringing the Venerians to submission, though none but America realized this at present."

While the old man spoke Nick glanced swiftly around the men to gather in their reactions. All were apparently intent upon Grove's words. but Nick knew that one of them was pretending. Would that person be impressed enough to give up what he had stolen? Nick doubted it.

"Full restitution must be made by the time the supply ship arrives to relieve us of our quarterly production of faltronium. How the restitution is made does not matter, but it must be made or drastic means to recover the stolen element will be resorted to."

As soon as he finished speaking Nick made a rush for Ann. This time he reached her without interruption, and it became Boldt's turn to glare and stalk away.

"Look here," said Nick, "we've practically become strangers. I've seen you only twice during the last few weeks. Boldt seems to be pretty effective at snaring pretty girls and keeping them occupied."

Ann smiled. "And aren't you?" she asked.

"You know darn well that Boldt doesn't give me a chance."

"Well, first come, first served, you know."

"That means you aren't very particular."

The girl wrinkled her nose. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that you don't seem to care one way or the other."

"Maybe I do, Nick."

Nick was puzzled this time. "You do?" he queried. "Who?"

"Maybe I haven't made up my mind yet," she teased. "Now I simply have to get rid of these dishes. If you can run faster than Rod, you might see me later on."

"It's a deal," agreed Nick. "I'll start training r i g h t away." He watched her go, his heart beating a little faster at the meaning he had made of her words. Perhaps she didn't care for Boldt as much as he had thought she did. There was some hope after all.

NICK DID manage to see Ann later on. Though it did not amount to much as a race, he beat Boldt in reaching her. Boldt retired sullenly, for he did not take these minor affairs as philosophically as

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Nick did. He sourly watched them don spacesuits and leave the airlock to take a stroll over Pluto's barren surface.

"You know, some guys never realize when they're licked," remarked Boldt to Atska in the laboratory the following work period. "They keep hanging onto something even when they know it's not theirs any more. "It's funny." He coughed a little, and glanced at Atska for approbation, but the little Martian remained silent.

Anger flared up in Nick. He knew very well that Boldt's words were addressed to him. And he knew what Boldt meant. But he kept his anger tightly in check.

He casually held up a bar of faltronium to the light and inspected it critically. "No," he drawled, "I wouldn't say that. Maybe the guy knows that the thing he's hanging onto is his just as mush as anyone else's. If he keeps hanging on long enough, he may even get it."

Boldt looked around with a tight grin. He spoke directly to Nick. "It may be that the thing in question doesn't want the guy to hang on."

"Oh, it wants him to hang on, all right. In fact, it wants him to hang on more than it wants to be grappled in by a woman-pirate."

"What did you call me?" cried Boldt, abandoning a subterfuge.

Nick was grimly exultant at having shifted the taunts to the other. "I said," he repeated, "that Ann does not want to be taken in by a—"

He never completed the sentence, for Boldt had leaped at him with swinging fists, his dark face twisted in rage.

NICK WAS crowded against the laboratory bench by the suddenness of the attack. Tools and instruments fell to the floor with a ringing clatter. Warding off a storm of blows with up-raised hands, Nick braced himself against the bench and pushed with all his strength. Boldt went reeling backwards, his balance momentarily lost. Before he could regain it, Nick's fast-travelling right fist had broken through his faltering guard. It made a loud pop on Boldt's chin and sent him swaying against the pulverizing machine with glassy eyes.

Panting a little, Nick watched him. "You started it!" he snapped. "Now come on and finish it!"

Atska was startled out of his customary silence. With popping eyes and mouth agape, he looked like a frightened gnome. "Boys....boys!" he admonished anxiously.

"Come on!" repeated Nick.

While leaning against the pulverizing machine, Boldt's hand had come into contact with a long, heavy wrench. He gripped it hard, the red gleam of murder in his eyes. Bringing it suddenly from behind his back, he once again charged at Nick.

Though Nick had been expecting some sort of action from his adversary, the wrench was a complete surprise. He whirled to one side—but his move was not quick enough to escape its whistling descent. Searing pain lanced through his left shoulder and exploded in his brain.

Mad fury flamed through him, and with total disregard of the weapon, he flung himself forward. He smashed into Boldt hard, knocked him against the pulverizer, and drove in swift powerful blows. As the wrench lifted for another deadly stroke, he ripped it from the other's hand, brought it up with murderous intent.

"Nick!"

The horrified cry penetrated his conciousness, and sanity immediately returned to him. He felt hands pulling him away from Boldt. Only then did he become fully aware of the pain which throbbed within him. He

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stumbled back weakly, focussing his eyes on Ann's pale face.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" cried the girl. "Only a coward would use a weapon on a helpless man! And I—oh, get out! Get out, you unspeakable brute!"

Nick stared at her. She thought—

"Ann," he tried to explain, "I—"

"Did you hear me? Get out!"

Nick's face went a shade whiter, and it was not from the pain in his body. He shrugged, turned abruptly, and left the laboratory. He gritted his teeth as he recalled the triumph he had seen in Boldt's eyes.

AFTER THE fight in the laboratory Ann avoided Nick as if he were a Martian vampire-bird. Nick was too proud to force his presence upon her and plead his case. About all he could do was stalk about the debris of his tumbled dream castles, and watch bitterly as Boldt and the girl smiled at each other and went for long walks in the darkness that cloaked Pluto's desolation.

Boldt seemed not to be aware of the fact that Ann's favors were a direct result of his own cowardice. He went about his work with a superior smugness, and often he would boast to taciturn old Atska of his plans to build a little home upon one of Jupiter's warm moons, knowing that Nick would hear. At these times there would be a mocking glint in his sidelong glances.

At length Nick could no longer bear the taunts which were so obviously directed at him. His armor of silence had been worn thin by constant battering.

"Boldt," he said, in a voice of cold rage, "either stop making those remarks, or find yourself another wrench and start fighting!"

Boldt opened his mouth to reply, but after taking in Nick's blazing eyes and taut fists, thought better of it. Sullenly, he returned to his work.

Unknown to both of them, Ann stood in the laboratory entrance, one hand at her white throat. She stared from Nick's grim back to Boldt's. Then she slowly turned and thoughtfully walked away.

Nick was not prepared for what happened soon after that. It was in the first few hours of the next working period that Grove came into the laboratory. Nick almost dropped the pan he was holding when he looked at him. The old man's mouth was a sprung steel trap, and his eyes were as cold as the ammonia banks on Uranus.

"I want to see you in my office—immediately!" he snapped at Nick. He stalked out.

NICK STARED after him in bewilderment. Something was wrong—seriously wrong. He glanced at Boldt and Atska as if they might be able to offer some explanation. But Atska was intent upon his work, and Boldt was coughing a little as he spread gravel upon a pan. Nick shrugged, and went swiftly to Grove's office.

Grove looked at him coldly as he entered.

"What's this all about?" asked Nick.

"Plenty!" snapped the superintendent. He handed Nick a small irregular object. "Do you know what this is?"

Puzzled at the old man's hostile manner, Nick peered at the little lump. "Why....why, it's faltronium!" he gasped out. "Where did you find it?"

"In your room, hidden in the bed," replied Grove grimly. "You're a thief!"

Nick flinched under the shock of it. "I'm afraid not," he said quietly. "I've

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never seen that piece of metal before, and I'd rather have my right hand cut off than to have taken it."

"The indisputable fact that it was found in your room shoulders aside all alibis," stated Grove. "I knew very well that the man who had stolen the element would not give it up, so I decided to search for it myself. All right, where have you hidden the rest of it?"

"There isn't any more! The guy who planted that in my room wanted to leave some for himself."

Grove sighed. "I'm sorry that you have to take this attitude. If you told me everything, it would be easier for you. The government needs faltronium badly, and when it learns that you have something like six bars of it hidden way, it'll go through any lengths to learn where the element is."

"You're taking too much for granted," said Nick. "I haven't stolen any faltronium, and therefore I don't know where it can be."

"Look here, under the articles of Interstellar any miner convicted of the theft of a rare element will receive one-third of his imposed sentence if he makes full restitution. But if he refuses to do so, he'll receive the full sentence, without any chance for a pardon. Now, Nick, if you refuse to give up the stolen metal you'll get the full sentence. You know what that means—life!"

"How in the world can I give up something I haven't got?" cried Nick, becoming angry. "I've never so much as taken a smell of faltronium!"

Grove rose to his feet. "You're making this hard for me—and for Ann. She loves you, in case you don't know it. Now come with me peaceably, for I'll have to lock you in your room until the supply ship comes to take you to Earth. I hope you'll change your mind before then."

Nick raged inwardly at the old man's blunt hastiness. But he realized that he'd have to submit. He would be able to think things out more calmly later on.

IN THE TINY room—a cell now—Nick lay down upon the bed and swore. It was clear, all too clear! He had been framed by the real thief, who no doubt wished to divert suspicion from himself. Who could that person be?

But it just wasn't reasonable, for there was no possible way in which faltronium could be stolen, and the finger of suspicion had never been pointed at any special person in the plant. Yet, where had that little lump of the element which Grove had showed him come from? And why had it been hidden in his room?

One of the miners might have found the lump, but why should he have planted it on Nick? Nick could find no credible motive for this. It had to be by someone who hated him—Boldt or Atska, but Boldt especially.

If it was Boldt, then where had he obtained that nugget of faltronium? He could have stolen it, of course. But how? How could he have stolen it without being discovered by Nick or Atska, without leaving any clue whatsoever?

Nick groaned. Hell, the whole setup was crazy from start to finish. Here he was, accused of something he hadn't done, and as good as bound for one of the more savage of the Jovian or Saturnian satellite penal colonies already. And Ann—Ann loved him. But she probably hated him now.

But he must not give up! He had to think—think! There must be some loophole to enable a thief to steal the precious element! He had to find that loophole before the supply ship came.

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Faltronium vaporized at fifty-four degrees Centigrade—that was little warmer than pipe or cigarette smoke....Suddenly he remembered something he had said to Grove while in the office—something about smelling. And then he thought of Boldt's cough. In a flash of realization, the whole puzzle clicked into place!

He knew how faltronium had been stolen! And he knew who the thief was!

BUT HE couldn't go shouting his discovery around the plant. After all, just what evidence did he have? He had to have proof, and the only way to get that was to determine where Boldt would hide the stolen element.

Nick put himself into Boldt's place. He'd have to hide the element in his room, of course, for that was the only place one could visit many times a day without arousing suspicion. But the hiding place would have to be good. The first requisite was that it be cold....Nick had several ideas about that.

Quickly he mapped out a plan of action. He'd have to get into Boldt's room—but first he'd have to get out of his. Though that would require violence, it had to be done, for he had more to gain than he had to lose.

Nick's face went grim. If he was wrong.... Why, it would mean a penal colony for the rest of his life! Interstellar was harsh where infringement of its rules were concerned—and especially those regarding the precious faltronium.

Nick waited impatiently until the gong for the lunch period sounded. Then he swung off the bed and crossed to the door, taking a position just to the left of it where the opening panel would conceal him from anyone who entered. He tensed his muscles and began another wait.

A half hour crawled by.

And then a key rattled in the lock. Hans the fat Europian cook entered the room carrying a tray of food. Nick pushed the door shut, grabbed the tray with one hand, and socked Hans with a fist made of the other.

Hans sunk to the floor, a look of surprise and reproach upon his round face. Nick placed the tray upon a chair, and began ripping the bed covers into strips. With these he bound the cook.

Then he opened the door and looked out into the hall. There was no one there, for all were in the dining room having lunch, and Grove had probably thought it unnecessary to post a guard over him. He slipped out and went swiftly to Boldt's room.

Nick looked around the little cubicle, which was an exact duplicate of his own. He had to find some cold place where Boldt would hide the element. That place would logically be along the walls, for they were next to the almost absolute-zero cold of Pluto's exterior. Grove had already searched the room, of course, but he hadn't looked in the right places.

NICK SCANNED the walls. Upon one was a picture, and with leaping heart, he crossed over to it. He tore the picture aside. But nothing more than a series of bolts with which the inner and outer walls were held together met his eyes. He carefully searched all the remaining walls, and finding nothing out of the ordinary, was ready to give up in despair.

That picture—it just had to have some purpose. Boldt was not the kind to use a picture for its mere esthetic value.

Nick went back to where the picture had hung, and at a sudden idea closely scrutinized the bolts which it had hidden. His eyes glittered in triumph—for some of them projected a

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bit more from the wall than the others!

At that moment a shot rang out.

Hans the cook had recovered and had loosened his bindings to give the alarm.

Nick tightened his lips—there was no time to lose now! Quickly, he inserted a fingernail beneath a suspicious-looking bolt and pried. A thrill of utter joy shot through him, for it gave, slid out! He was looking into a narrow hole which penetrated the inner wall and the insulation behind it—right up to the outer wall. By peering very closely he could just make out the tiny, dull lump that lay at the furthermost end of the hold—faltronium!

Just then he became aware of the clatter of footsteps. He whirled around just in time to see Boldt come catapulting into the room!

"Damn you!" rasped Boldt. "I thought so! Well, you'll never live to tell anyone about this. You're an escaped prisoner, see? I shot you in self-defense!" He grinned wolfishly and gestured with the small automatic that he held.

Nick took the only chance that was left to him—he flung himself at Boldt's legs. While he was still in midair the gun roared. He felt a dull blow in one shoulder. And then he and Boldt were in a writhing tangle upon the floor.

Nick grasped at Boldt's wildly-flailing arms, got a grip on his gun-hand. Using both hands, he savagely bent Boldt's arm backward. The other screamed in pain, but did not relinquish his hold on the weapon. He smashed at Nick's face and head with his free hand. Doggedly, Nick held on, exerting more effort.

The gun dropped to the floor.

Boldt went mad. Face contorted with rage, fear, and pain, he lashed out with kicking legs and flying fists, sobbing and cursing at the same time. Nick rolled aside and got to his feet. As Boldt followed the move and scrambled upright, Nick hit him a swift, powerful blow that started from his knees and contacted Boldt's chin with a loud smack. Boldt folded up limply and sprawled back to the floor.

Nick straightened up and turned. In the doorway crowded the entire personnel of the plant.

"What a fight!" cried the miners.

"You hitted me!" accused Hans.

"Nick, oh, Nick!" sobbed Ann.

"Easy there," said old Grove from behind a huge heat gun. "I've got you covered."

Nick swayed and clutched at his wounded shoulder where daggers of pain were stabbing. "Wait!" he gasped. "Look there....That's where Boldt hid the metal he stole....He tried to kill me just now to keep from telling you—"

"THERE!" said Ann, as she patted the bandage about Nick's shoulder. "How's that?"

Nick grinned up at her from where he lay in bed. It was some time later. "Fine!" he replied.

"All right," growled Grove impatiently. "Spill everything. How did you know it was Boldt? How did he steal the metal I found in that hole?"

"Well, it's like this," began Nick. "Faltronium becomes vapor at fifty-four degrees Centigrade, and at that temperature it's not so very hot. It can be inhaled without much pain, but it irritates the membranes of the throat and lungs. That's why Boldt coughed, and that's what gave him away.

"I never thought it unusual before, but each day when the lunch or the end of the working period gong rang, Boldt would raise the cover of his heating unit, presumably to see how

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much gravel remained in the pan. But what he really did was to take a big breath of faltronium vapor into his lungs!

"Then he'd go quickly to his room, move that picture aside, pull out the bolt which he had previously loosened, and exhale the vapor into the hole revealed. Naturally, contact of the vapor with the extreme cold of the outer wall caused it to condense and form a tiny lump like you showed me.

"Whenever he took a stroll, Boldt would extract the solidified lumps and hide them somewhere out on the surface. I suppose he didn't have any more in the hole when he wanted to get me away from Ann by framing me, so he had to inhale and condense more vapor. If he hadn't done that, he wouldn't have gotten back his cough, and I'd never have guessed that he was the thief."

"I must be getting old," said Grove, shaking his head. "I know everything that happens to the element, but I never thought of that before. And—er—I'm sorry about my hastiness in accusing you. You see, I was getting calls from the home office and the government so many times of the day that I was ready to go space-crazy. Of course, the element being found in your room....well, you know how it is."

"I understand," said Nick.

"Anyway, the government will have six more bars in addition to what we have produced by our increased output. It ought to have enough to run a thousand ships. Those Venerians are as good as licked right now."

"And now you go on out," ordered Ann firmly. "Nick is badly hurt and needs rest."

Grove looked from his daughter to Nick. Suddenly, his face was jolly again. The old twinkle was back in his eyes. "And to think I nearly jailed my future son-in-law!" he chuckled as he obediently left.

THE END

SPACE SCHOOL

By A. T. Kedzie

WHEN YOU say "Lunar Base" these days, everyone knows you are referring to the Special Navigators' School. And everyone also knows that this is one of the toughest and hardest schools in the Solar System.

Here, raw recruits from the strange and varied peoples of the System, are brought together and taught to work and operate together as a military group, for no one knows if there will or will not be another invasion from Antares. And unless we are better prepared this time, we will be unable to beat it off. Therefore the need for Lunar Base.

When Elrik Kay took the final test he was as nervous and as jittery as anyone who had ever tried to pass through the school. When he finished it, he was the finest product that it had ever generated.

It was on the final test that he had his great adventure which was said to have sheathed his nerves in nickel-vanadium. And he never denied it. The final test calls for the student-applicant to be shoved in a space-boat, a two man craft usually, and then dumped somewhere outside the system. He is then to find his way back to Lunar Base.

They dumped Elrik some two light-years outside the Plutonian orbit and left him to shift for himself. He had three months to make it back to Luna. And he didn't come for five!

The Service never released the story until some twenty years later nor did they explain until then why Elrik graduated with highest honors. But the truth is strange:

When Elrik, candidate for a commission in the Service, found himself floating in free space, he was no more alarmed than the usual student. It was his job to navigate back and he knew how.

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He waited for ten hours before he broke the seals on the instruments, as was the custom so he couldn't follow the vessel which brought him out.

As soon as his instruments were working, he caught a pip on one of the 'scope screens. He assumed automatically that it was his mother ship. Something had gone wrong. He followed the trace to get orders.

But when he finally reached the strange pip and glanced out the port, it wasn't a Terran craft he was gazing at at all. That monstrous elongated cylinder was just one thing! There was no mistaking an Antarian invader. What had happened he immediately knew, was that this was one of the few which had not been tracked down and destroyed in the recent fracas. The gigantic ship remained quiescent, nor did a tractor fasten on him.

There was only one thing to do. He flipped his plate closed on the space suit and prepared to try to board the ship. He knew how close to death he was—but he did it anyhow, first triggering a crudely rigged transmitter which he made from spare electronic tubes. He hoped to find the ship an empty shell.

Well, he got in through an air-lock without much trouble. Then he saw what had happened. Space madness had caught the Antarians and they had cut each other down with horrible ruthlessness. The ship's interior was a shambles and no living thing existed.

But unfortunately a few of the reptilian things were still alive. Elrik didn't know this until he was almost cut down by a ray gun. The resultant battle that ensued lasted for sleepless nights and days, and from the Service's later releases, was an heroic thing indeed. We pass it briefly over it except to say that Elrik, badly wounded defeated the remaining three or four space-maddened reptilian monsters and then collapsed.

The fighting had triggered the driving tubes and it was only by a miracle of tracking that a Terran vessel finally found the runaway. They had already found the lifeboat through its warning radiations.

To avoid scaring the public of three worlds, no mention was made of Elrik's performance for two decades. Finally his heroism was made known. You know the rest of it—Gentlemen, I give you, Commander of the Service, Elrik Kay!

SKY-HOOKS

By W. R. Chase

THEY WEREN'T really anti-gravs because no such thing had yet been discovered, but the video ads made them irresistible.

"Hook yourself to the sky," the ads screamed, "Have fun with a rocket-harnass." Actually that's just what they were—harnasses with controllable rockets for steering and back deflectors for safety. They were selling like mad in metropolitan Loss-Ang for three hundred credits.

The price and the ads were too much for Stanger. The idea of strapping a rocket to your back and floating all over the countryside was just too much for him. One afternoon after his four hour work-stretch at the relay plant, he 'coptored downtown and bought one. On the way he passed several people using them rapturously.

When he returned home he put it on immediately. It was simply a matter of stepping into a couple of boots, adjusting a few clamps and straps. The control box fastened to his chest. For a moment he felt like a fool but the instant he touched the stud and felt the surge of life from the rockets on his back, he knew that this would be fun.

He rose to a few hundred feet and felt the thrill of manuevering. It took him perhaps a half hour to get the hang of the studs. From then on it was strictly fun! He soared and zoomed like a bird; the almost-silent flight was uncanny.

Suddenly the controls refused to work. Stanger found himself dangling in the air five hundred feet from the ground, the rockets hissing at his back quietly—but he was unable to move. He hung there helplessly. There were no people or 'coptors around and a feeling of panic seized him. What to do? He wriggled and twisted and briefly changed his thrust. Then he realized the danger. If I'm not careful, he thought, and I turn nose down, I'll bury myself in the ground. So he hung.

"Hey, Birdman!" a raucous voice suddenly called. Stanger breathed a sigh of relief. The police 'coptor was almost on him.

"Having fun?" a monitor asked humorously. "You guys are beginning to give me a pain in the neck. I'm picking people out of the air like plums. Why'nt check these things?"

Stanger laughed—at last he was able to. "Next time I will, believe me," he said. "Whew! Say...what happens when one of these crazy gadgets is overpowered? There's no altitude control in them, is there?"

"I don't know, brother," the monitor said as he reached out gingerly and drew Stanger aboard, avoiding the burn of the rockets, "but we'll sure find some character that'll try a Lunar trip with 'em!"

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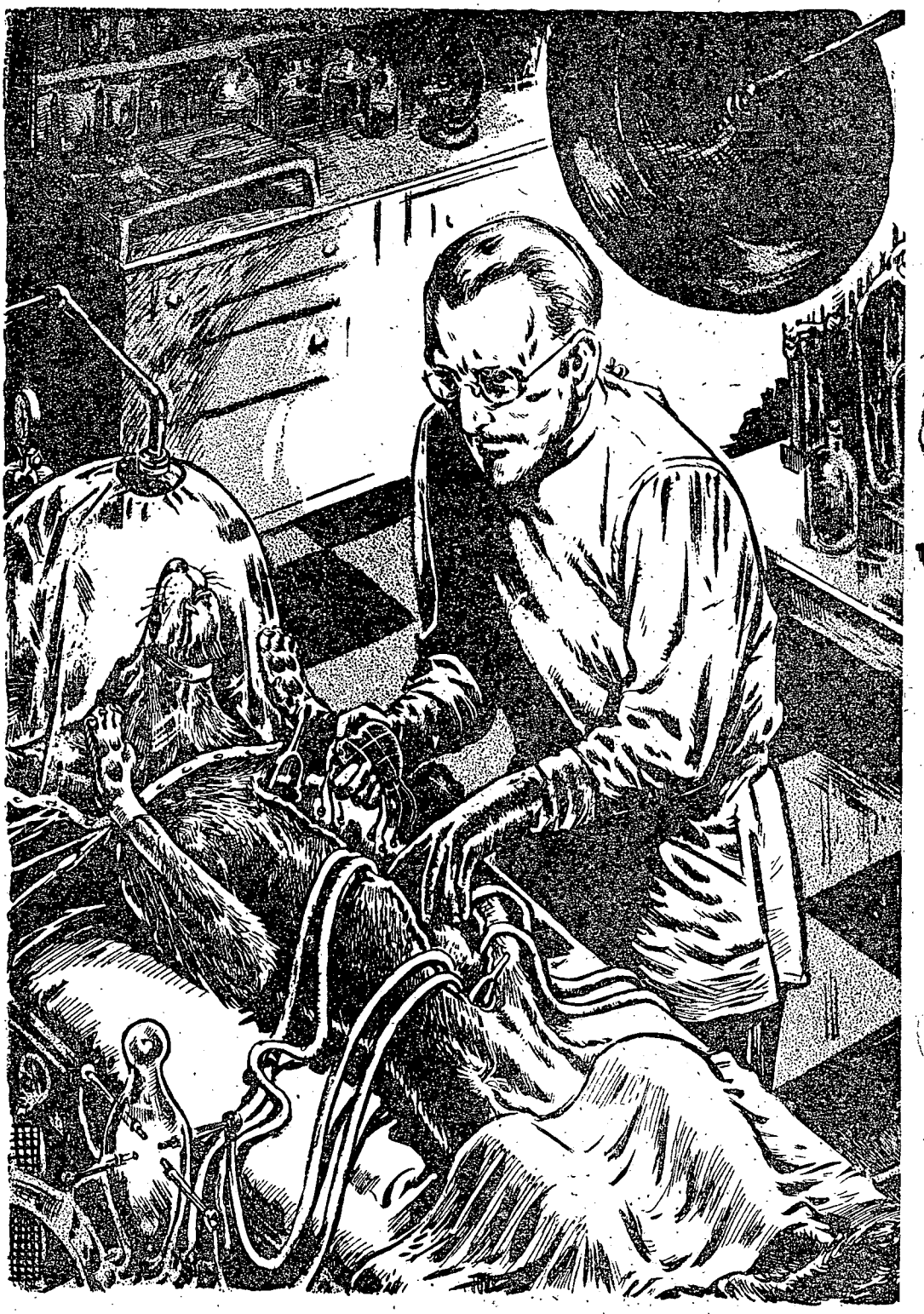

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The FRIENDLY WOLF

By CRAIG BROWNING

It was an interesting experiment: take a wolf and a rabbit and interchange their instincts—then turn them loose and watch

THE TIMBER wolf appeared suddenly in the path twenty feet ahead of me. In the split second it took for me to raise my rifle and fire I noticed that its stomach was drawn in, its ribs showing, and wondered why a wolf should look half starved in this north country where game was so plentiful.

I felt the instant I had squeezed the trigger that it was a miss. I had aimed for the heart. The slug caught the wolf somewhere. The animal was knocked over. I flicked the reload and got ready for a second shot.

It was the final stage of the work: now the heart had to be put in place and the tiny wires all connected . . .

But the wolf was behaving queerly for a wolf. Half lowering my rifle I took a better look. My first shot had paralyzed its hind legs. It had risen on its forelegs and was trying to stand. But that wasn't what made me hesitate.

What made me hesitate was the fact that it was whining in a friendly tone, and its eyes seemed almost happy, rather than fierce and wild.

As soon as I saw it couldn't attack me I began to approach it for a closer look. Its hind quarters were laying sideways. Its bushy tail was wagging like that of a friendly dog. It whined again, softly, the sound strangely like that of a Collie.

Marvelling, I reached out a hand, ready to draw it back swiftly at the first sign of a snarl and a snap of those powerful jaws. The snarl didn't come. Instead, the wolf nuzzled my hand, still whining in a sort of talking way.

I could have closed my eyes and sworn it was a Collie. Instead, I felt tremendously sorry at having shot so hastily. Apparently this wolf was somebody's pet. Even though timber wolves were a common thing up here in the woods—and especially dangerous this time of the year, it was a shame to have hurt one that was somebody's pet.

But if it was a pet, why was it half

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starved? And even if it was a pet, in the starved condition it was obviously in it should have been ferocious.

Impulsively I dropped to my knees and took its head in my arms, murmuring comforting things to it. After awhile it died. I felt very bad about it.

I let it lay in the path. That way I could find it again if some other wolf didn't drag it off. The day was young and I wanted to do a lot of hunting. I was supposed to skin the creature and turn the skin in for the bounty; but the thought of doing that to it when I might have to take it to its owner made me decide against it.

I walked on.

IT WAS half an hour later that I came across the rabbit. It was a fuzzy little cottontail. I saw it on a log off to the side of the path at the same instant it saw me. I grinned at it. I wasn't out for rabbits.

When it leaped off the log in my direction, rather than the other way, I stopped. It wasn't until I felt its teeth in my leg that I reacted to its unorthodox behavior.

Frantically I stamped at it. It evaded my feet and came at me again. Its teeth tore my leg three or four times before a lucky kick caught it. It landed a few feet away, out cold. I used the butt of my gun to break its neck.

Then I shook my head, marvelling. First a timber wolf as friendly as a Collie, then a rabbit ferocious as a wolf. It didn't make sense.

I picked it up and tossed it into the underbrush, then went on—with a wary eye out for rabbits.

The next wolf was normally ferocious. Altogether I bagged four of the wild ones before deciding to turn back to the cabin. In the excitement of the hunt I had all but forgotten the rabbit and the friendly wolf.

I would have passed the spot where I killed the rabbit without a thought; but it was laying there right in the path. It was stiff now. But how had it climbed back on the path? I had broken its neck!

I kicked it off the path and went on to the place where I had left the tame wolf. I didn't see its body at first. Then I saw it laying a few feet off the path in the brush. Some other wolves had gotten to it. It was pretty well devoured.

About to turn away, I caught a gleam of something metalic. I looked closer. There was something made of metal under its ribs. Dropping my pack of wolf hides I dragged the carcus back to the path and used my knife to cut loose the thing of metal.

There was no mistaking what it was, though I had never seen one nor heard of one actually existing. It was a metal heart.

IT WAS about twice the size of an ordinary wolf heart, its outer surface and its shape giving no hint of its inner workings. From it led four short metal tubes to which arteries were attached. I scraped at the artery segment on one of the tubes and found that it was growth-bonded to the metal. Scraping the metal, I found that it was as hard as chrome.

I looked up from the metallic thing I held in my hand. I looked into the trees, the shrubs, and along the path; and my amazement grew. How could such a thing be?

Suddenly I remembered the ferocious rabbit. Did it have a mechanical heart too?

I stuffed the metal wolf heart in a pocket and hung my bundle of

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pelts on a tree branch and made my way back to where I had left the dead rabbit. It was still there, this time where I had last left it.

An hour later, with the dead rabbit and the wolf pelts on my back, and the metal wolf heart in my pocket, I reached the cabin.

"Hello, Jerry, you old son of a gun!" a familiar voice shouted. It was Harvy Tremont, my law partner. I had rather expected him to decide there was no use sticking around the office during court vacation.

"Hi, Harv," I yelled back at him, hastening to meet him.

On the spur of the moment I decided to wait a while before telling him what I had discovered, so it was after a supper of beans and fried ham before I brought out the metal thing and let him see it.

"The explanation is obvious," he said after studying it. "Some great experimental surgeon must have a laboratory near here. This is one of his experiments. It must have gotten loose and gone back to its wild state."

I told him about the rabbit. Then, while he watched, I started to work on it. First I lathered and shaved it. I was looking for scars in the skin. I found them. Scars that indicated surgery.

I cut into the body carefully until I had exposed the small metal heart —and something I had missed in the wolf. It was a small button from which extremely fine wires radiated. Fine as wires from an old Ford spark coil, they radiated from the small metal button to the metal heart, the stomach, the liver, the kidneys, and to spots where there were small things my meager knowledge of anatomy couldn't identify. Nor was Harv any better.

The rest of the evening we spent discussing the thing. I told him every detail of the behavior of the two animals.

"Just putting in a mechanical heart couldn't reverse the nature of a beast," Harvy said. "Or could it? Come to think of it, it might, to a certain extent. When you get excited or mad your heart beats faster. When it beats faster you get more excited. If you had a heart that refused to beat faster when you get mad, it might have the effect of calming you down in a hurry."

"There's more to it than that," I said. "That button with its radiating wires—do you suppose it could be some sort of control for glands and organs? Getting mad or afraid causes the adrenals to work, shooting adrenalin into the blood. I vaguely remember reading somewhere that emotions upset the balance of the glands, and that upset of that balance produces emotions."

"I think you've hit something there," Harvy said. "That's what caused the reversal of nature of these two animals. Their glandular balance was fixed by the control to owner and operator, could not help upset in a different way. A rabbit's reaction to seeing you would ordinarily be fear. This one's was rage. A wolf's would ordinarily be rage. This one's was friendliness."

"It adds up," I concluded. "Somewhere around here is probably the world's greatest surgeon. Tomorrow morning we'd better take a trip down to the store and inquire about him."

THE "STORE" as it was called, was really a trading post. Twenty miles north of Trail, it served as supply depot for the dozens of fellows like myself who owned cabins in the British Columbia wilds where they could get away from city life and relax at times. Ike Garson, its

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but know everyone. The road from Trail was so tortuous and, in places, so steep, that it was impossible to go in and out from Trail on a tank of gas. Therefore no one could possibly come into the country without stopping at the store and buying gas.

I knew Ike Garson would know who the master surgeon was and how to get to his place, because he had wormed out of me the fact that I was a lawyer, my name, and all pertinent data about me the very first time I had come up here, and had not forgotten any of it two years later when I showed up the second time.

But I also knew that, inquisitive and retentive as he was, he was even more close mouthed. A man could hide out from the law in these foothills of the Canadian Rockies without Ike ever turning him in—but not without Ike knowing he was hiding out. It would take a little adroit handling for us to get him to tell us if a doctor was up here.

In the morning we took my car. I took the two metal hearts and the metal button with its fine wires with me, shoving them in a deep pocket in my jacket. It was only four miles to the store from my cabin. It took three quarters of an hour to drive it. That's the kind of road it was.

Ike Garson and a couple of Indians were busy unpacking some canned goods when we walked in.

"Howdy, Mr. Blish," he said.

"Howdy, Ike," I replied. "Ike, this is my law partner, Harvy Tremont."

"I know," Ike said dryly. "Met him yesterday." He reached out a lean hand and shook with Harv, gravely acknowledging the introduction.

"Say, Ike," I said, putting frankness into my voice. "Do you know a doctor that has a cabin up here? The reason I ask is that a doctor friend of Harvy's in Spokane is coming up here to spend a couple of weeks with some doctor. He invited us to drop around, but I don't have any idea where the doctor lives up here."

"There ain't no doctor up here," Ike replied. "Nearest one's half way to Trail. Say! Maybe you mean Doc Leary. He's a doctor but don't practice none. Has a cabin up beyond you, but on the other fork. What'd you say the name of your doctor friend was?"

"Dr. Nelson," Harv said smoothly.

"Ain't arrived yet," Ike said. "I'll tell him where you live when he does."

"O.K., Ike," I said. "Thanks. What I really came down for was some more bacon and flapjack flour. And I've got four wolf hides out in the car."

"Good work, son," Ike said. "I'll send Charlie out and get them."

IT WAS nearly noon before we came within sight of doc Leary's cabin. The road on the right fork was even worse than on my own, which I would have considered an impossibility.

It was several times bigger than my own cabin. Two stories high and maybe forty feet wide, with a solid shingle roof—designed for both winter and summer living.

There was a nice car parked under a flimsy structure with slab siding. Between it and the cabin was a small truck with enclosed body.

I drove boldly up in front of the porch. Harv and I climbed out of the car, slamming the doors. Harv waited for me until I rounded the car, then we walked up the plank steps to the generous porch together.

Harv knocked loudly. The sound echoed.

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"Gone hunting, maybe," he said.

"Yeah," I agreed. "If he were here he would have answered by now. Let's try once more, though. I hate to go back without seeing him after all the trouble it took to get here."

Harv knocked again. When he stopped we could hear sounds inside.

"He must have been asleep," Harv suggested.

We relaxed. A moment later the door opened.

I remembered Dr. Leary the moment I set eyes on him in the doorway, but I didn't let on. He had an unusually wide brow with receding scalp, and wide spaced eyes that seemed even more wide spaced because of the small, narrow nose.

He had been mixed up in a fight with his neighbors over some dogs he kept. The S.P.C.A. had taken it up, and the newspapers had aired it. All that had been ten years ago when I was in high school.

"Doctor Leary?" I asked. At his nod I said, "I'm Jerry Blish and this is my law partner, Harvy Tremont. I own the cabin over the hill on the other fork. Ike Garson told me my nearest neighbor was a doctor —and I thought I would drop in and get acquainted."

"Oh yes. Yes," doc Leary said in a naturally thin, reedy voice. "Won't you come in?" He said it so clinically that for just an instant I had a fleeting impression of nurses and inner offices and things.

I stepped past him, Harv behind me. The doc was a trifle taller than either of us, but in an almost fragile way. And he had that air of abstraction I had run across occasionally in people. I called it zero personality. It was different than a negative personality in my books. With a negative personality you at least feel the person is human and is reacting to your personality; but with a zero one you are always conscious of a total lack of reaction.

The metal hearts were burning my pocket. For some reason that lay in my subconscious, however, I hesitated about mentioning them.

"Ike says you've been living up here quite a while," I lied. I sighed elaborately. "Wish I could afford to. Quiet and peaceful away from the noise and bustle of the city. Best I can do is two or three weeks once a year."

"Yeah. Me too," Harv put in his two bits.

"Then you're going back to the city soon?" doc Leary asked, his tone slightly hopeful.

"In a couple of weeks," Harv answered.

"No doubt you're hungry," doc Leary said. "It's quite a drive up here from the store. Make yourselves comfortable while I fix some lunch. There're some magazines over there on the table."

Again it was like a doctor, telling you to wait in the reception room. He disappeared through a thin slab door to the back of the cabin.

I walked over to the table and picked up a magazine. It was as I had suspected. The doc had brought his office magazines up here with him. The newest one was seven years old!

TEN MINUTES later doc Leary reappeared with a tray. On it were two plates loaded with hot canned beans, some bread and butter, and two empty cups. He set it down and went back to the kitchen, immediately coming back with a cup of coffee in one hand and a percolator in the other.

"I won't eat with you," he said. "I very seldom have a midday meal; but I'll have coffee with you."

He poured from the percolator

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into our cups, set the perculator on the table, then sank into a chair facing us, his cup of coffee still in his hand.

He tasted the coffee, then drank some of it noisily. The beans were my favorite brand. I was hungry. Harv evidently was, too. In a few minutes we had finished the beans and our first cup of coffee.

Doc Leary got up and poured us a second cup. I had decided not to let his manner bother me. Let him act like a doctor! To heck with him.

I set my freshly poured second cup of coffee down and lit a cigaret. Harv did the same. Doc Leary watched, then stood up.

"If you'll excuse me for a moment..." he said.

I watched him go up the stairs to the second floor. He was nearly at the top when my cigaret dropped out of my fingers. I rescued it from my lap hastily. The quick movement made me feel funny.

I blinked my eyes, took a deep drag on the cigaret, and turned to look at Harv. As I looked, his cigaret dropped from his lips. He went through the same motions I had—quick rescue of the cigaret, dazed look, then blinking eyes.

Then we looked at each other with dawning comprehension that was changing to horror. We had been drugged!

I leaped up and started to run toward the front door. I could never remember afterward how far I got before I passed out.

* * *

I awoke.

Did you ever wake up like that? Abruptly? Fully awake and vividly alive? I was awake. I was intensely awake, and I knew that in my sleep I had been so intensely happy about something that I had had to wake up to consciously enjoy being so happy.

I tried to remember what I had been so happy about in sleep; but everything about me was so conducive to enjoyment of being awake that I couldn't recall it—and quickly decided that whatever it was, it couldn't have been more enjoyable than the things around me, now that I was awake.

Directly over my head the rafters of the roof merged with the wall. A small gray spider lurked there in one corner of his web. I had never seen such a cute spider nor such a beautifull one. His gray coloring was soft and mousy. His tucked-in legs were hollow nylon reeds containing threads of muscle ready to come to life. His web, beautiful and gossamer, stretched between the two rafters, trapping the brilliant dust motes that cavorted in the narrow shaft of sunlight coming from a pinpoint hole in the shingles directly over it.

My scalp started to itch. Absently I started to reach up and scratch it. My hand was arrested half way up. I turned my eyes to see what held it. My wrist was imprisoned in a band of steel lined with soft leather, and a light but strong chain went from the bracelet to the side of the bed.

But in the same instant that I discovered that, the itching in my scalp became a pleasure-pain. I became almost dizzy with the joy of it—and the links of the chain were beautiful, gleaming circlets of linked metal—a poetry of form. I was happy they were there. If they hadn't been I might have scratched my scalp and never known the ecstacy of pleasure the itching was causing.

It was wonderful. I writhed in a delirium of joy. And in my writhings my hands jerked against the chains and I discovered a new source of

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ecstacy in the pleasure-pain of the bracelets of steel and leather jerking at my wrists.

I sobbed in happiness as I flailed my arms, jerking at the chains. Each abrupt, violent jerk sent a wave of dizzying ecstacy through me.

But now, a delicious drowsiness was creeping over me. A lethargy possessed my arms that was as wonderful as the pleasure-pains. They relaxed on the covers.

Dimly I saw the face of doc Leary hovering over me. Then I closed my eyes and slept.

THE GRAY spider, the Evil, Evil gray spider dropped slowly until its lecherous, fat body touched my cheek. I tried to move. I was paralyzed. I had managed to lift my head a little. It froze in position.

The gray spider began to weave a web about my head. Round and round it went, leaving its trail of web behind it, ever thicker, ever more dense, choking, blotting out light.

In horror I knew what it was doing. It was enwrapping my head in a coating of web. Then it would lay its eggs. The eggs would hatch out into thousands of baby spiders within the cocoon, and they would feed on me—my eyes, the tender flesh in my nostrils, my tongue and throat.

I knew now the source of my paralysis. The spider had stung me. I wouldn't die. I would be conscious and alive while the baby spiders fed on me, so that my flesh would remain firm with life and not rot.

But suddenly I broke the bonds of paralysis. I awoke. The little gray spider was in his web in the rafters, his glittering eyes watching me. And I knew that my dream had not been mine, but the thoughts of that evil little insect.

It watched me with its beady eyes and waited. Waited for what? For me to become weak. That was it.

The smell of dust was strong in the air. This was an attic, up under the rafters. Thin shafts of sunlight bit through the gloom and lit up the insanely, madly gyrating dust. It filled the air I breathed, coating my nostrils.

I lifted a hand and suddenly remembered the chains. I was chained! Chained in an attic by a mad doctor! Why?

I had been drugged. I remembered everything now. There had been dope in the beans—or was it the coffee? And Harv had been drugged too! Doc Leary was going to put metal hearts in us like he had in the wolf and the rabbit.

He was going to make us into monsters! He was going to cut into my chest and take out my heart—hold it dripping in his hands, then toss it aside while he inserted a metal pump.

He couldn't! I wouldn't let him. I had heard of animals gnawing off a leg caught in a trap in order to get free. I would do the same. Better to escape without my hands than to have my heart taken out.

By bringing one hand up as far as it would go and bending my head over I could reach my wrist with my teeth. Sobbing, my saliva making the skin of my wrist slippery, I bit in.

A hand gripped my hair and pulled my head back. A sharp pain stabbed at my shoulder. I had been too late! Doc Leary had come! He was bending over me. He was drawing a needle out of my shoulder now. I fought the unconsciousness creeping on me. I knew it was too late. I would never be myself again—because—he—was—going—to....

I WAS ASLEEP and yet not asleep. I felt—separated from my-

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self. I was looking at my thoughts as if I were removed from them. I was remembering my delirium of joy, and my agony of fear.

I knew the truth. Doc Leary had operated on me after he had drugged me. Those two waking nightmares had been caused by emotions—emotions produced by the mechanisms he had placed in me.

They had been necessary. It had been necessary to calibrate the emotion controls and search for normal settings.

I tried to remember how I had felt during those times of emotion. How many had there been? I had a vague memory of being mad with rage and anxious to kill, happy and delighted at everything about me, sad and despondent, weeping, laughing, bitter, coldly unemotional, worried, terrified...

What was I now? I was apart from my emotions in some way. My thoughts and emotions were on the other side of the room of my mind where I could look at them objectively. I could—I could be terrified or sad or anything at all now, and it would be objective rather than gripping me in its subjective force. And yet—I couldn't have any emotions right now.

I opened my eyes. The little gray spider was still in its web. It was slightly shrivelled—dead from starvation.

A movement at the foot of the bed caught my eye. I looked down. Doc Leary was standing there watching me.

"How do you feel?" he asked.

"All right," I answered.

"Do you feel anger at me for what I've done to you?" he asked.

"N—no," I hesitated, exploring my feelings.

"I want you to understand why I did it," he said. He was trying to be human, I knew; but it still came out clinically. He had been immersed in his profession too deeply.

"I knew there was no danger," he said. "I'd done it to all kinds of animals. I learned after I doped you that you knew that. I found the artificial hearts in your pocket and realized they were the reason you had come to see me. But I didn't know that then. It had nothing to do with what I did.

"I knew that no man in his right mind would ever give his consent for such an operation. Yet I also felt that any man would be very glad it had been done when it was an accomplished fact."

I looked at his wide eyes and overly broad forehead and listened.

"But even if it didn't turn out as I expected it to," he went on. "I knew that eventually I would have to do it to a human being. I'd done it to dogs, rabbits, wolves. I'd done it so many times it was reduced to simple routine like taking out an appendix. But never to a creature that could talk and reveal how it affected the mind. Even if it had destroyed your reason I would have had to finish my work—my life work—by doing it to a human being."

I felt the beginnings of pity for him stir in me—and slip away. I listened and watched the play of expression on his face.

"I would have done it to myself—gladly—rather than to anyone else, if I could. I would rather have done that, so I could study the mental effects first hand. But you and your partner showed up. It was an opportunity I had waited years for. I seized it without hesitation. I didn't wait. Every minute might mean I had lost my one opportunity. Regardless of what might happen after it was over, I had to do it.

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"You won't regret it, I think. I've spent days upon days perfecting the controls, thinking of everything, making them fool proof—perfect. You might think ill of me for a time. But fifty years from now you won't. You will still be alive and healthy. I don't know how long you will live; but if a perfect heart that will never wear out or run down, and a mind that remains calm and untroubled except when you want some specific emotion, are all that it takes to keep the body healthy and young, then you should live many centuries."

THERE WAS a thin film of waxy perspiration on his wide forehead with its baby-smooth skin. His eyes were bright.

"I'm going to set you free shortly," he said. "I had to have you in chains before—until I could study your emotional states at various settings, and determine the settings for stability. You might have hurt yourself or killed me while you were adjusted insanely. You might still kill me. The act of killng doesn't need an emotional key. It can be done with calmness as easily as with rage or fear or frustration or frenzy. I won't care too much now. My researches are finished. I've sent the film record of the operations and my detailed reports and still pictures to the proper places for such things. My life work is done and I'm ready to die."

The film of perspiration was slowly drying out. He was calm again.

"The control center is about where your appendix would be," he went on in an easier tone. "I want you to take it slow and learn how to operate it. It's fixed so that unless you are pressing on one of the emotion studs you will have a calm mind. That way, if your emotions get out of control they will automatically revert to normalcy in the frenzy of movement they set up. Do you understand what I mean?"

I nodded, but didn't say anything.

"Perhaps," he said, a smile flitting over his lips. "You will find manually controlled emotions an asset in your law business. For example—"

He stepped around from the foot of the bed and pulled aside the covers. His hand reached out, and a finger pressed a spot on my side.

He was such a pathetic old man. He had lived a solitary life—persecuted by his neighbors until he had had to retreat to the wilderness where there were no neighbors. If I could only comfort him, take his tired head in my arms and comfort him.

I blinked back the tears, unashamed of my feeling.

Then his hand drew away and he stepped back to the foot of the bed.

"You see?" he said quietly. "Sorrow—turned on like striking a chord on the piano. Genuine emotion instead of simulated. You will learn how to use it—and all your emotions."

He smiled. Drawing a small key out of his pocket he came around and unlocked the bracelets on my wrists. They fell away, dropping to the floor with a rattling of the chains attached to them.

"NOW YOU'RE free again," he said, stepping back.

Cautiously I sat up and moved over until I was sitting on the edge of the bed. Doc Leary watched me.

I stood up, swaying weakly for a minute, then feeling strength course through me.

I pulled aside my white cotton hospital cloak and looked down at my skin over the spot where the emotion controls were. There were tattooed words in a small circle.

"You press on the tattoo mark for

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the desired emotion," doc Leary explained.

I nodded my understanding.

"The harder you press the stronger the emotional intensity," he added.

I nodded again. Then I went over and put my fingers around his throat.

I pulled him over to the bed and pushed him down, not in a hurry to squeeze too hard. He didn't resist too much.

The look in his eyes was more puzzled than afraid.

I made sure I could do what I intended doing with only one hand, then reached down and pressed the spot that said "Happy."

Almost at once I felt very happy. I smiled happily at doc Leary and unleashed the strength in the fingers of my other hand, about his throat.

He struggled a little. At the last the puzzled look in his eyes was replaced by fear.

At the very last his eyes suddenly came to life with what seemed to be a flash of comprehension of the reason why I was killing him. The reason I HAD to kill him.

Then he was dead. I was happy. I was happy he had understood. I was happy it was over. It felt good to be happy. I kept my finger in place and took the key and went in search of Harv.

When I found him and learned doc Leary hadn't performed the operation on him I pressed the happiness button harder and became very, very happy about it.

We found my clothes downstairs in a closet. We drove back to my cabin in silence. I knew he was trying to understand why I had killed the doctor.

He did the driving, while I sat there, one finger on the happiness button, just strong enough so that I remained mildly happy.

When he stopped my car beside his in the shadow of my cabin I climbed out. He walked beside me. I pushed open the door and went in. He was right behind me.

I went over to the chest of drawers by the bunks and looked at a picture setting there. It was a picture of my wife.

Then I searched for and found the sadness button and pressed it gently. I felt tears well into my eyes.

Behind me I heard a long drawn breath containing a wealth of comprehension and pity I knew now that Harv understood why I had killed doc Leary.

A lawyer doesn't spend his life in front of a jury where he turns his emotions on and off like stations on a radio.

I cried softly—for myself—and for the timber wolf who had been starving slowly before he met up with me because he could feel only friendliness for his natural prey.

Then I lifted my finger, and felt my thoughts smooth out into unruffled calm. In time I would get used to being a lawyer twenty-four hours a day.

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH:—

DIANA AND THE GOLDEN RING

By S. M. Tenneshaw

The gripping tale of a little girl who read of the goddess Diana and the mischievous demi-god, Pan, and who believed so strongly in her fantasy world that she wandered through time to the foothills of Olympus. You'll thrill to her adventure there!...

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UNKNOWN WAR

By H. R. Stanton

THERE IS a war going on which is unknown to most—and which will be decided sometime in the future. This war is very real and we are all taking part in it. at present we're holding our own—no more than that—and the future presents us with two alternatives. We can either win or we can lose.

This war is fought with creatures a minute fraction our size, unarmed, undefended, and unorganized. But they stand a very good chance of victory. The paradox and contradiction lies in the fact that whether they win or not is dependant mainly on what *we* do.

Our opponents are the insects.

That isn't a joke at all. It is a deadly serious battle. The insect world outnumbers man enormously, it reproduces at an incredible rate, it can survive under impossible conditions. This last capability is the one that gives it the best chance of success.

If we destroy ourselves with the atomic bomb, with radio-active material, we are lost. For no matter how dreadful the destruction, the insects will survive it, adapt themselves to it, reproduce and multiply, and asusme command of their changed environment.

On the other hand, our brain enables us to combat the insect successfully. Our armament is powerful and above all we have brains and an understanding of organization. These things the insect world lacks.

So there are the simple facts. Which shall it be, Men or Insects? Will, as some poet has said, an insect crawl from the eye-socket of the skull of the last man, look around contemptuously, and realize that he is the master of all he surveys? Or will the powerful tools of men destroy all but the natural balance of the insect world? Which of these two conditions are realized will depend simply on the behavior of people now living and shortly to be born!

UNWILLING EXILE

By June Lurie

FRANKEN snatched another tube of coffee. The hot fluid flooded through his body and gave him new strength. The tiredness fell from him like a cloak.

I'm so close, he thought, so very close. I can't fail! I can't. The ferocity of the feeling startled even him. The "breadboard" arrangement of electrical equipment seemed like a hodge-podge of junk, but to Franken's eyes it was the most beautiful sight in the world. An outsider would have thought it a battered video sender or simply a pile of junk. But this was the source and origin of something that was to affect the future very much.

Skillfully Franken manipulated tools. The touch of a screw-driver here; the whine of an electric drill there; the sparking of a welding electrode. He left the equipment for a while and thumbed through his notes which, along with numerous texts, littered a desk in the corner of the laboratory.

Here was the product of a lifetime's research. Franken like all scientists knew nothing of the nature of gravitation, but instinctively when doing his work on electromagnetic fields he felt the kinship between it and them.

If what I do tonight succeeds, the System will be forever changed! Who has not wanted to conquer gravity?

At last the groundwork was done. All that remained was for Franken to test his handiwork. It it failed nothing would happen; if it succeeded—

Gingerly Franken reached out and touched the potentiometer, a circular dial, which moved smoothly. For a moment nothing happened. He turned it farther.

Abruptly the mass of equipment rose from the table. It rose slowly and Franken's mind went wild with jubilation. Convulsively he jerked, and the equipment shot skyward!

It was then Fate intervened. The convulsive movement sent Frank bumping against his equipment just as he deflected the control too severely and just as the equipment shot skyward. His sleeve caught on the jagged edge of the mechanism, and equipment *and* Franken rose like a rocket. Terrified Franken almost blanked out as they shot through the flimsy skylight.

Then the sleeve tore, some five hundred feet, from the rapidly rising machine. A horrible scream lanced through the air as Franken tumbled to his death...

"Too bad about Franken," his colleagues sympathized when the body was found pulped, near a neighboring park. "How did the poor fellow tumble from a 'coptor?"

And no eye could see one of man's greatest inventions rising ever and ever more rapidly into the reaches of space...

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JOYBOY—3000!

By Lynn Standish

FENLAKE THREE shoved the calculating machine from him, and his little mustache wrinkled in repugnance. He yawned and stretched. "Ugh," he said to no one and gazed distastefully at the luminous walls of his office. His desk, a gleaming sheet of titanium was now a mess of scriptopens, paper and calculating instruments. Fenlake Three was tired and bored.

Abruptly he galvanized into action. He punched the communicator button at his right hand. As the light flared, he spoke: "Fenlake Three—number four oh eight six three—classification engineer—aerotronics. Make an appointment at Pleasure Cell Twenty for me for this evening at twenty-one hundred. Check?"

"Yes sir," a crisp feminine voice answered but the flatness of the tone confirmed its robotic qualities.

That evening an aero-cab dropped Fenlake Three before the ramp of an impressive structure. It was busy now and many people were leaving and entering. The reason was clear. On its face was displayed a huge fluorescent sign which winked on and off. "Pleasure Cell Twenty", it said, and in smaller letters, "Hypnofun!"

Quickly Fenlake checked with the appointment desk. He was rapidly escorted to his room. He entered it familiarly. It was completely barren except for a single heavily over-stuffed chair. Otherwise the room was totally bare.

The attendant removed a small kit from his belt, as Fenlake threw himself into a position of comfortable relaxation in the chair. For the first time he spoke.

"What will you have sir?" His hands worked with the kit and soon he was adjusting a large hypodermic needle. "Love? Hate? Work? Relaxation? Thrills? Danger? Fear? Peace? Friendsh—"

"—Relaxation!" Fenlake snapped, "I've been working too hard."

"As you wish, sir."

The attendant fumbled with a tube which he inserted into the hypodermic syringe. "Ready, sir?" he asked solicitously. "Go ahead," Fenlake answered. He extended a bared arm. Skillfully the attendant sterilized the arm, inserted the needle and pressed home the plunger.

Almost at once the terrific biting tension which had seized Fenlake, vanished and gradually a euphorious world of utter ease overwhelmed the engineer. Before the harmless drug took hold, Fenlake thought: Hypno-mechanics are wonderful! I'll feel like a million in the morning. How could people live before Hoffberger's discovery? Think I'll try danger next time..."

Gradually the silken threads of hypno-consciousness replaced the iron bonds of normal awarement. Fenlake Three was at his ease. Contentment washed over him like a wave. Work was a day away but it would never overtake him—he was too comfortable...

CONDEMNED!

By Cal Webb

IN THE glowing fluorescent room of stelloy, the nine black-robed jurors sat. The scene conveyed the gravity of the trial and the dignity of the justices was accented by the solemnity of the proceedings.

A tall gray-haired justice arose, his robe sweeping around him. He looked calmly and gravely at the squat powerful man standing below him. The man's hands were gripped by metal cuffs and two guards stood beside him.

The judge opened his mouth and an instant hush fell over the crowded courtroom.

"This tribunal has found you guilty of murder in the first degree," the judge said simply. "Under ordinary circumstances, your brutal murder of three persons for personal gain would be regarded as a psychological maladjustment and you would be judged criminally insane. But this court has consulted with your psychiatric investigators, had observed your courtroom behavior and has listened to your testimony. This evidence clearly demonstrates that you are a cold-blooded and mercilessly cruel man in full possession of your faculties. It is determined that no treatment will benefit you and that you even now, feel no remorse, but simple anger with your failure.

"Therefore it is the duty of this court to see that you are destroyed as a hopeless degenerate atavism. To that end, therefore this court sentences you to death by the merciful agent of radioactive injection. Take the prisoner away!"

Five minutes later, the condemned murderer was led into the lavishly equipped medical offices of the Legal Commission. He was permitted to smoke a cigarette.

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The defiant fearless smile of contempt for the court remained on his face. The judges came in moments later as witness.

When the prisoner had finished his cigarette, he was fastened to a simple chair with a couple of plastic straps. The executioner, a doctor, stepped up to him with a hypodermic needle.

In one deft motion he plunged the instrument into the prisoner's neck, gently but firmly and squeezed the plunger. Before the plunger went home completely the man was dead, so swiftly does the radioactive agent act on the brain tissues.

"I pronounce the prisoner dead," the doctor said undramatically as he stepped back.

All the men in the room breathed freely now that the tension was gone. Execution in the Twenty-third century, even to its practitioners seems barbaric and unnecessary, but for this man there was no other end. Conscious incorrigibility can only be defeated by death.

The judges filed from the room...

THE TELEPATHIC MURDER

By Dan Corliss

THE DATE, twenty-eight twenty-four, is now as familiar to everyone, as their own name. It should be. For it was the year in which commercial telepathy became practical. For that matter, though it isn't as well known, that is also the year in which Zed Thane invented the telepathic amplifier—and ironically enough it is also the year in which Zed Thane died.

If you dig through the microfilm files of the Legal Enforcement Organization, if you're willing to spend a little time going through the records, it is possible to find an almost exact reconstruction of what happened in Thane's little workshop which he called his laboratory.

The light-flecked film has a grim tale to tell. And it includes much of the background of Thane without which it is impossible to understand what happened.

Zed Thane was one of those rare individuals who is capable of fine theoretical research and superb laboratory work. A glance at the Patent Office files discloses numerous inventions in Thane's name—including the famed telepathic amplifier.

As far as his work goes, Thane's life was ideal. The same for his ability. A chain of circumstances led directly to what happened.

When Zed Thane finished his schooling, he wanted nothing so much as to study privately for five or ten years. He knew then that he had to have leisure but—Zed Thane was poor. So it surprised no one, when he met, "wooed" and won Beatrice Mattox, the widow of an extremely wealthy manufacturer. How much of his wooing was avarice and how much love we do not know; regardless, Thane bound himself in this web which proffered all the material things he needed, and after a short time his love—if it was that—turned to hate.

He did nothing however. He maintained this pretence of loving his wife. Actually his hate for her was almost physical as we now know. He detested her utterly, yet he breathed no slight suggestion of his attitude. His friends knew his state. His wife's did not, or if they did, they did not tell her, and she was not a brilliant or astute woman. Hence she retained the illusion. What a tragedy that this ill-matched couple underwent!

The record shows very clearly how and why Beatrice Thane murdered her husband. Her simple testimony describes the affair perfectly.

"...I walked into the laboratory where Zed was working. He had asked me over the interphone to come there. He told me that he had just achieved his life's ambition, the invention of an electronic device for amplifying human thought, making it strong enough to be detected by another. He was enthusiastic. He said that he'd tried it on Martin (his lab assistant) and it worked.

"My husband then reached down to the table top and picked up the amplifier which he set on his head. At once I was stunned for within my mind I heard or felt distinctly, his thoughts. The first thought was one of joy and glee. In fact, that was what my husband was really thinking about. Then he looked at me.

"I never received such a shock in my life, for it seemed as if I were peering into his soul. I felt such a searing blast of dislike and hatred that I almost fainted. It came through very clearly above the conscious thoughts of joy and pride in invention.

"The thought impact was almost physical. Something happened within me. All I remember is walking calmly over to the laboratory desk, reaching into the drawer and taking out the gun. My husband must have divined my intention. He shouted 'no! no, Beatrice, don't!'. But his hatred came through even the fear-thought. I shot him four times..."

The Thane Telepathic Amplifier is now commonplace. The tragic history of its origin is not. It is interesting to note that Thane's wife was acquitted on a plea of temporary insanity. For despite his hatred for her, it is clear that she loved him.

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READER'S PAGE

A FIRST LETTER

Sirs:

Give Robert Moore Williams credit for my first letter to any magazine. An author like Williams certainly deserves it. He really outdid himself when he wrote "The Bees of Death" in the October issue.

And I most certainly must add that Rog Phillips is maintaining his good reputation with "Planet of the Dead". I place that yarn among the "bests".

Also, I'd like to congratulate you on the way you handle the Reader's Page. It's bringing your fans closer together, in a friendly, chatty group.

So far in FA I haven't seen much praise given to the short factual articles, so I'm going on record saying that I enjoy them immensely.

Here's to future issues!

Howard Blind
503 Ray Ave. N.W.
New Philadelphia, Ohio

Welcome into the fold, Howard, and thanks for the compliments. We just love 'em! And let's hear from you again.....Ed.

BETRAYED—HUH?

Sirs:

You betrayed me! You were among my favorites—but now you leave me out in space dying of vacuumities! —There wasn't one good story in the October issue—not one good story, but *five!*

I can't decide, really, which was the best yarn. "The Octopus of Space" by Alex Blade, and "Planet of the Dead" by Rog Phillips were tied, I guess, for first place. But the others were not far behind! And even the fact articles were good. I liked especially, "Where—In Space?" by A. Morris.

So three cheers for a perfect issue. Let's have more like it.

Ahem. Can I plug the greatest little fan club in stf fandom? The World Wide Fantasy Fans can be joined by writing to Bob Farnum at 1139 East 44th St. Chicago.

See you next issue.

Ronald Friedman
1980 East 8th St.
Brooklyn, 23, N.Y.

We gather the issue was so good it was killing you. All we can say is, it's a nice way to die! But just wait until you read next month's stories!.....Ed.

IS WE OR ISN'T WE?...

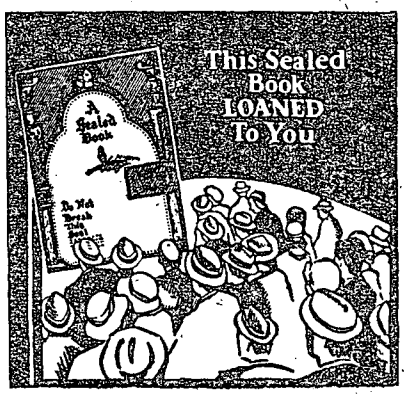
Sirs:

You, Ed, are William L. Hamling. Or are you? Since Rap resigned I'm all befuddled. Maybe I'm writing to Mr. Ziff or Mr. Davis. Possibly to Howard Browne. Gad, for once that stereotyped "sirs" came in right handy. Anyhow, with Browne at our figurative fingertips, it might be possible to squeeze some Tharn novels out of him!

O.K., now to the current issue. Reader's Page is larger than it was last time—but of course, not large enough! Expand it three hundred percent.

"The Insane Robot" in spite of the au-

(*CONTINUED ON PAGE* 154)



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SELLS FIRST STORY AT 60

ince I am crowding threescore, my objective in taking the N.I.A. urse was not to become a professional writer. However, while still king the course, I sent an article to St. Joseph Magazine. It was mediately accepted. Encouraged, I wrote others. Our Navy accepted em and asked for more. All thanks to N.I.A."—Albert M. Hinman, 37 East Silver Street, Tucson, Arizona.

How do you KNOW you can't WRITE?

Have you ever tried?

Have you ever attempted even the least bit of training, under competent guidance?

Or have you been sitting back, as it is so easy to do, waiting for the day to come when you will aken, *all of a sudden, to the discovery, "I am a writer"?*

If the latter course is the one of your choosing, you probably *never will write.* Lawyers must be law rks. Doctors must be internes. Engineers must be draftsmen. We know that, in our time, the egg does me before the chicken.

It is seldom that anyone becomes a writer until he (or she) has been writing for some time. That is ıy so many authors and writers spring up out of the newspaper business. The day-to-day necessity of iting—of gathering material about which to write—develops their talent, their insight, their back- ound and their confidence as nothing else could.

hat is why Newspaper Institute of America bases its writing instruction on journalism—continuous ng—the training that has produced so many successful authors.

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Many people who should be writing become awe-struck by fabulous stories about million- re authors, and, therefore, give little thought to the $25, $50 and $100 or more that can often e earned from material that takes little time to write—stories, articles on business, fads, ooks, current events, sports, homemaking, local and club activities, etc.—things that can easily e turned out in leisure hours, and often on the impulse of the moment.

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(*CONTINUED FROM PAGE 152*)

thor's habit of splitting infinitives, cop first place in the November FA. As to cover story, I've found that most are w ten about a preconceived painting, and, some reason, don't make the grade. current one is no exception. All of wh makes the issue an average one.

To return to the "Insane Robot" fo moment, the thing which lifted the st out of the ordinary was the snide rem that "acti-fen" are mostly fit material the booby-hatch. Pros, of course, are finished product...

Well, I hope that Lee Francis *can* th of a way to bring Avar back. Matter fact, he should have had a way alre figured out when he wrote TMFY. Or m be he got into the same predicament M Twain found himself in when he hac character who actually was a woman who was masquerading as a man nan as a father, when to deny it, he (or sl had only to unmask. —Except that if did (She), she would be hanged. Remem that one? Avar seems to be in a sim predicament. But, here's hoping.

I'm looking forward to the new P novel next month. You know, I think should always use a novel as the lead. N that the mag is increasing in pages t should be easier to do.

Incidentally, next month the Internati al Science Fiction Correspondence Club celebrating its first anniversary with inaugural of its first set of officers. A the club zine, the *Explorer*, is being mir oed. To join, only a subscription to club mag is required. Come on, some of passi-fans, let's hear from you...

W. Paul Ganley
119 Ward Rd.
North Tonawanda, N

If you'll look at the masthead, Paul, yo see the correct listing of editors for F But you're right, we are WLH. (We? T makes us at least a dual personality. yes, that's right, our other self puts out Martian edition of FA. After all,

STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946
(TITLE 39, UNITED STATES CODE, SECTION 233)
Of Fantastic Adventures, Published Monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1949

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher William B. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Editor, Howard Browne, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Managing Editor, William L. Hamling, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; Business Manager, A. T. Pullen, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. 2. The owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual member, must be given.) Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; William B. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; B. G. Davis, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; A. Ziff, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill.; S. Davis, 185 N. Wabash Ave., Chicago 1, Ill. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: (If there are none, so state.) Modern Woodmen of America, Rock Island, Illinois. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. 5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was:——
(This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspaper only.) A. T. PULLEN, Business Manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 22nd day of September, 1949. [SEAL] ALBERT H. WITTHOFT, Notary Public. (My commission expires April 9, 1950.)

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ooxians of Mars like to read about those outlandish Earth Creatures too, you know!) .....*Ed.*

A GOOD YEAR FOR FA

Sirs:

Although this is my first letter to your magazine, I have been a faithful reader since '41. FA is my favorite stf mag. It even rates higher than Amazing Stories!

Your November issue was a dilly, even if the cover story, "Queen of the Ice Men" did remind me somewhat of another Geier yarn, "Ice City of the Gorgon".

"My Name is Madness" was a wonderful tale. First place. "The White God of Chichen Itza" was an excellent bit of fantasy, so second place. Third place is a tie between "Sleepwalker of Sandwich" and "The Insane Robot". "Queen of the Ice Men" hits fourth spot. For some reason it lacked something. A good story but not up to the rest in the issue. "Lunar Holiday" is fifth—a real nice space opera. And in last place, "The Biological Barrier" which is old stuff to me.

This has been a good year for FA. There have been several wonderful stories, and many good ones. Even a couple of classics! Here are a few that I thought were really tops:

"Blue Bottle Fly"
"Five Years In the Marmalade"
"Unforeseen"
"On the Back of a Beetle"
"Incompatible"

Well, that's all for now. Keep the swell issues coming...

J.W. Peers III
Route 2
Adairsville, Ga.

We always like to hear from new readers, but you should be chastised for not writing us before. Reading FA since '41 and never dropping us a line. Well, we hope from now on you'll get in with the gang and have a lot of fun. Anyway, welcome into the fold; we're glad to have you!.....Ed.

HE NEARLY SWOONS!

Sirs:

First off, I'd like to say that the October cover was really swell. I always liked Swiatek, and this was an excellent job. Speaking of artists, in the October issue, four of the five interiors were topnotch. Keep using men like Jones, Swiatek, Loehle, Sharpe, Anderson, and Krupa. Oh yes, Kohn too.

You know, whenever Alexander Blade writes an interplanetary yarn of from 15 to 20,000 words, I nearly swoon. All I can say is, keep him writing more stories like "The Insane Planet", "War of the Giant Apes", and "The Octopus of Space".

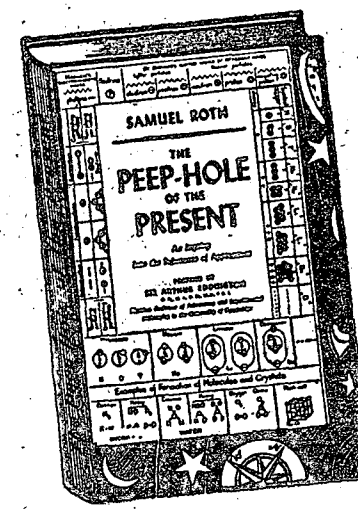
Craig Browning turned in a fine story with "The Form of Hunger." A fine interplanetary yarn. I thought, of the shorts, "The Beacons Must Burn" was the best.

Then we come to "The Bees of Death",

THE MOST AMAZING NEWS OF THE DAY

is that, living at the bottom of the atmosphere, we are at the center, not as we thought at the top; of the earth. As the Greeks believed, creation stems from us. The stars, suns, planets, and all other heavenly phenomena constitute the earth's electronic accompaniment, each performing organic functions in it, and in our lives, as vital as those of our eyes, hands, and hearts.

In his reordering of the new facts of physics, prefaced by the late Sir Arthur Eddington, of Cambridge University, England,



Samuel Roth describes such a revolution in our conception of the world that, compared with it, the changes wrought by the two world wars fade into insignificance. For instance,

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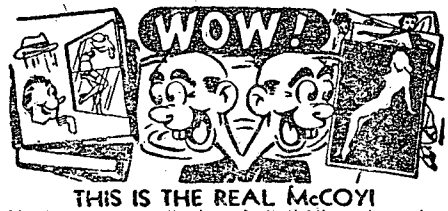

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Well, Blade is beaten. That yarn of Bob Williams was really swell.

Speaking of Blade, he had a yarn in the August issue that was a minor classic. I'm speaking of "The Man Who Laughed At Time". What a yarn!

All in all, a swell issue. And on top of it, the Reader's Page is back. What more can we ask for?

Thanks again for a wonderful issue.

Terry Carr
134 Cambridge St.
San Francisco, 12, Cal.

We take it, Terry, that you really like Blade, Williams, and Browning. Well, we do too, and we'll try and get some more topnotch yarns from these boys for you. Get them? What are we talking about—we've got some already! You'll be seeing them very soon. And let's hear from you again after you read the next issue....Ed.

FACTS OF THE FUTURE

By Lee Owens

LUNAR COFFIN

JOHN STANTON lay comfortably ensconced within the anti-acceleration cushions of the rocket. His eye watched the chronometer on the instrument panel and his finger poised over the firing key. Hundreds of yards from him a crowd shouted itself hoarse with adulation. People breathlessly awaited the escape of Man from the planet. Stanton would circle the Moon and return. The world of the Twenty-First century could ask no more. That was the Alpha and the Omega.

Inside the slim steel hull, Stanton was unaware of the plaudits. His carefully trained and exquisitely briefed mind was focussed on one function—the rocket must go perfectly.

The needle of the dial crossed the zero point and Stanton touched the stud. Instantaneously a monstrous forceful hand seized him and forced him against the padding. Even as he lost consciousness, Stanton smiled.

An hour later he came to his senses and as his eyes opened they scanned every instrument and every meter. And everything was right. Exultantly Stanton smiled. *He* was the first man in space! Here in this frail shell Man was asserting his birthright and Stanton was the medium! Through the port Stanton saw the magnificent breath-taking vista of a blackened sky glittering with a myriad of exquisite jewels. The starlight intoxicated him. He inhaled deeply of the artificial atmosphere and it smelled as sweet as new-mown hay.

And then the enormity of the experience clutched at him. Stanton felt an icy hand

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around his heart. He was far from anything and anyone and anywhere. He was alone; he was as alone as it is possible for anyone to be. No he thought, until now, no one has ever been as alone as I am. I am the One—the only one in all the infinite reaches of space.

A little bubble of terror seeped through the lowermost cells of his cortex, and Stanton felt an all-conquering fear. It was not fear in the ordinary sense of the word. It was an overwhelming *knowingness*. He, Stanton, could not bear this. He could not! Then the raving maniac within the steel shell babbled and mouthed senseless phrase while the spittle ran down his chin. And as his sane consciousness recoiled, retreated, then absorbed into the all-embracing anodyne of madness, Stanton screamed.

The first rocket to the Moon glided magnificently on, bearing within it, a twisted madman. And nothing stopped the Lunar Coffin. Man had reached into space...

* * *

MANIACAL MENTANICAL

MALONE touched the stud alongside the chair and the reading lamp increased its output of light. He settled back more comfortably and picked up his book. It was an historical survey of Twentieth Century science culminating in a description of the Biological Wars of 1988—94. He reached for his drink. Real socko, he thought as the fiery brew slid down. He went on with his reading.

Gradually he became aware of a funny feeling. A strange sensation overtook him. He had the uncanniest idea that someone was staring at him. He looked around the room. There was no one there.

He went into the chromium-glass service kitchen. And there it was.

The instant Malone spotted the Z-24, he knew something was wrong. The mentanical stood perfectly still about ten feet behind and facing the door, as if to stare right through it. Its gleaming metallic body stood rigid, its tentacles hung at its side, but its lens-eyes glistened emotionally. Malone faced it. He sensed that any mismove on his part might start a tragedy—with him the victim.

"Z-24," he said softly as if he were soothing an animal, "what is wrong?"

The mentanical's voice box made no sound. It continued to stare impassively.

Malone's heart began to pound and beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. He knew he was in a spot. The wrong move, and—blooey! Frantically he searched the kitchen for a weapon—foolish thought though it was. The five hundred pound mentatical would dissect him as easily as a butterfly.

This is it, Malone thought. I can't make the outer door. He'd be on me too quick. I can't fight him. There's only one thing left to do. Malone stepped forward.

He reached for a light switch. "Look," he said quietly, "look, Z-24—see the colors

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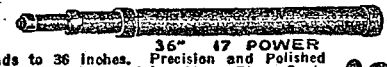

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change. See how they go on and off. Watch them. Aren't they nice?" He felt like a fool talking like this. But he knew he did the right thing. The mentanical lifted its grotesque simulation of a head and watched the flickering light. On and off. On and off.

Still manipulating the light switch, Malone slid his body out the door and reached the intercom-mike, "Apartment 311," he gasped, "please send a robot technician and the Legals. There's a nutty mentanical in with me, Hurry! Hurry!"

Twenty minutes later Malone watched the technician dismantling the mentanical. The man glanced up at him: "Rough, eh?" he asked sympathetically.

Malone wiggled his aching arm; "And how," he agreed. Then he laughed. "Sometimes it takes a gadget to catch a gadget."

* * *

CALLISTO BEAM

THOSE UNSUNG men who man the astro-stations and keep the light of civilization flickering throughout the Solar System, are giants indeed. Marooned and isolated in their little dwellings of ferro-concrete, they tend the atomic generators which supply the power for the radio pulses sent into space to give the ships of the System a "fix" an anchor point in the limitless reaches of the void.

Some will dispute this, but no worse Astro-station exists than the one on Callisto. So far, this point on the lonely moon of Jupiter, is the outermost of the stations though rumor has it that since the discovery of uranium on Pluto, a station will be built there also.

Regardless of that, the Callisto radio-pulse beam is housed under as weird conditions as one may imagine. Half buried in an "ice" of solidified ammonia and methane, the station has huge generators to supply the power to keep the antennae free of this matter so that the beam may project itself into space strong and clear. The constant watchfulness, the continual attention that must be payed to instruments, all coupled with the omnipresent danger of attack from grotesque and impossible life-forms, makes the operator's work, living hell.

No one has ever catalogued the incredibly different numbers of ammonia-breathers, but their diversity is legion.

Officer Crandall recently received a citation for his efforts in keeping the beam clear while under attack from the "Gassys". It was a critical occasion because a freighter was attempting to dock into a Jovian settlement at the time. Crandall did his job well.

He was aware of the attack when the instruments showed the antennae not rotating. Without hesitation and with magnificent courage, he took two hand guns, suited himself, and left the astro-station, single-

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handedly beating back, with his heat guns, an overwhelming force of the amorphous and ever-changing "Gassys". These five cubic foot clouds of gas manifest themselves by a solidification into psuedo-arms and legs capable of wrenching a space helmet right from its suit. In spite of this risk, Crandall scattered a host of more than forty with blasts of his heat weapons. It was a matter of seven hours before he had broken the back of the offense. The Gassys finally broke off and did not return. All the while the beam played clear and strong.

It is hard to find men who will devote themselves to this duty and provisions are now afoot to enlarge the stations considerably so that reliance need not be placed on a single man. But until such intentions become deed, men like Cranston will guard the vital spaceways...

* * *

'COPTOR—POLICE!

MARK CLANE settled his body more comfortably against the foam-cushioned seat of the 'coptor. Gently his fingertips toyed with the controls and the little ship slithered quietly through the air at two hundred miles an hour. There was little noise and less vibration. This is the life, Mark thought. These new models are really smooth. I'm glad I bought a Jensen 2331 model. Maybe it did cost a little more but so what? I'm making enough. Business is good.

Mark glanced down at the slim concrete ribbons beneath him. It was hard for him to imagine that once those "roads" had been used by vehicles. In most places the roads were disappearing as Nature spread a protective blanket of vegetation over them. Mark shuddered at the thought of a bouncing ride in a primitive road-car.

The cigarette tasted good. Mark inhaled deeply. He glanced at his watch. Oh-oh—eighteen-hundred. Jorine expects me for dinner in fifteen minutes. I'll have to step it up.

He touched the hand-throttle. With a burst of acceleration, the 'coptor leaped forward. Two twenty-five, two fifty, two seventy-five. The hiss of the overhead blades grew a little louder. The jets made a bit more noise. I'll hit Suburbia in ten minutes Mark thought to himself and grinned in anticipation. Jorine would be waiting.

Suddenly the red light on the instrument panel flashed ominously and at the same instant Mark's eye caught sight of the hovering monitor-dome! The air-lane was automatically patrolled! The loudspeaker burst into raucous activity.

"'Coptor 871W," it bawled, "cut your jets. You are under arrest for violation of speed law 43. Identify yourself at once!"

Mark shrugged. I should have known

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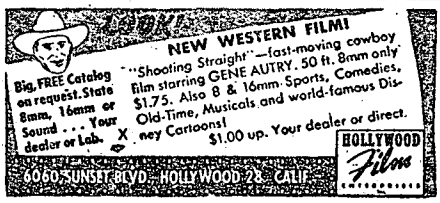

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better, he thought. He spoke into the mike: "Mark Clane, registration number 8376241. Visiting friend in Suburbia. Exceeding speed regulation. No excuse."

The speaker answered:

"Turn your controls to automatic. We will land you in Station Sixteen. This violation calls for two hundred credit fine." Mark obeyed and flipped the controls to automatic pilot. He knew a radio beam would operate from here on in. He grinned wryly—to be caught by a robo-dome! It was humiliating. Well, he'd just have to pay the fine.

A few minutes later the 'coptor slid softly toward the roof of a low flat building, half concealed by trees. When it landed Mark stepped out. The procedure was very clear.

He walked down the ramp. Of course no one was in sight. Traffic offices were completely automatic. Mark went over to a desk and selected an appropriate blank. He filled in the details, noted his bank and credit numbers and signed his name. He shoved the blank into a machine which stood against the wall.

There was a whirling of mechanisms. A speaker rattled:

"Credit satisfactory—fine payed," it said. "Please do not repeat violation. Record shows second offense. Third violation means withdrawal of operators' license. You may leave."

Mark walked rapidly back to the 'coptor. He didn't mind the speeding or getting caught or paying the fine—but it was kind of disturbing to be scolded by a machine!

* * *

FINALITY . . .

TAR-THEEN tapped the glassite helmet which encased his spongy head set upon a rubbery body. His heavily-lidded eyes blinked in the strong sunlight and through the insulation of his space suit he could feel the unaccustomed warmth.

His hissing sibilants reached through the helmet phone to his companion. "Pantheen," he said slowly, gazing around him, "what do you make of it?"

The other Martian, clad identically, flung wide a tentacle in a sweeping gesture. "It is impossible," he said, "it is completely impossible. We are dreaming. Such creatures never lived." The sweep of the tentacle included in its orbit the vast panorama of the gigantic Earth-city in which they and their rocket now rested.

Tar-theen moved a limb, reminiscent of a psuedopod, against a heap of bones. They crumpled into dust and a gentle swirl of wind swept them away. And wherever the Martians looked the numberless piles of whitened calciferous material lay, still and quiescent, the bones lying in the whitened sepulchre of Earth.

Slowly the two explorers moved through

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the city and nowhere stirred a trace of life other than vegetation. Protoplasmic matter did not exist.

And all around stood the monstrous engineering accomplishments of Man. Gigantic bridges and vast buildings. Huge structures and vehicles. It was as if death had descended in one fell swoop wiping all living things to nothing.

Tar-theen and Pan-theen returned to their vessel, the treasure house which they explored all but forgotten before the ghastly tragedy which confronted their eyes.

And when the days and weeks went by, they put together their quickly acquired knowledge, for they had plenty. The works of Man were endurable, more so than He, though He had passed. And they read the hideous tragedy in a thousand writings and warnings for the script of the Earthmen was easily decipherable. "The Biological War had begun and ended," said one brief tract," and the world waits its death agony helplessly, for against the filterable virus, no agents or weapons exist."

It was with reverence that the two Martians left the planet. With reverence and understanding for the queer un-managable creatures called Humans who once, so long ago, imagined the Universe their province, only to succumb to the filterable virus, bred in their mad laboratories.

"Could I but weep," Tar-theen wrote in his report to the Ruling Council, "I should practice that Earthly expression of anguish to the end of my days, for it is so easy for Man to destroy himself..." Tar-theen did not use the word "Man" in its limited sense—he meant any thinking sentient creature. "We have been shown the Way," he went on— "...it must never happen to us..."

* * *

METAL BOUNCER

THE SALOON was a typical dive located on the fringe of the rocket port. It catered to the hard-bitten men who came out of space and demanded the most potent beverages that men could concoct, drank them, and vanished back to their ships—sometimes. At other times they tore apart any particular place that struck their fancy.

Guu, the philosophical Venerian sized up the rolling gait of the gigantic earthman who just swung through the door. His heavily lidded eyes took in the sun-blackened hard-bitten face of the man. He sighed. He knew what was coming.

The Earthman rolled up to the bar. He sized up the Venerian contemptuously. He banged a huge fist on the bar. "Gimme a *slug of kor-kor*—and leave the bottle here," he roared. "I'm gonna do some man-sized drinkin'!"

Mentally Guu agreed. Anybody who could swallow the stuff much less like it, was undoubtedly a real drinker. He placed

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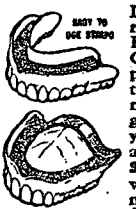

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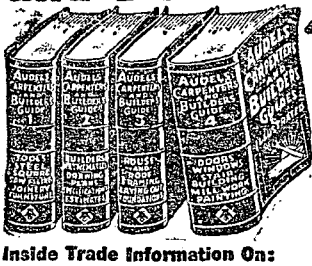

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a glass and bottle before the spaceman and accepted the credit book, tearing out the right amount.

Guu went to the end of the bar and spoke softly and sibiliantly into the phone there. Then he went back to the center of the bar and awaited the inevitable.

The Earthman took a slug of the potent brew. He shuddered as it went down and shook his shaggy head. Immediately he poured another and wolfed it down and then a third. Guu's eyes popped. This was going to be fast.

The Earthman swayed a little and then downed a fourth. Suddenly and without warning he picked up the bottle, took it firmly by the neck and shot it unerringly at the bartender. But Guu was fast. Moreover he was expecting it. He ducked and the bottle shattered into a thousand pieces along with part of a huge mirror and a dozen other bottles.

Silently Guu thanked his gods that he had the credit book. Calmly the Earthman announced in stentorian tones; "I'm gonna tear this stinking hole apart!" He walked over and seized a chair. "Hurry!" Guu prayed.

The saloon door swung open. Standing in it was the Earthman's equivalent...but its passive shining features betrayed its substance. The huge robot thundered forward, its steps shaking the floor. As a child seizes a piece of candy, it tore the chair from the drunken Earthman. Its arms flashed around the bulk of the man, seizing him in an unbreakable grip. The smiling face of Guu arose above the bar. He glanced at the credit book in his hands. "Back to Dock number Three," he said.

The robot lumbered out clutching the screaming infuriated Earthman. Helplessly the man thrashed around held gently but firmly. Guu watched the two disappear. He went over to the phone. "The service has been performed," he said, "what is the fee?..."

* * *

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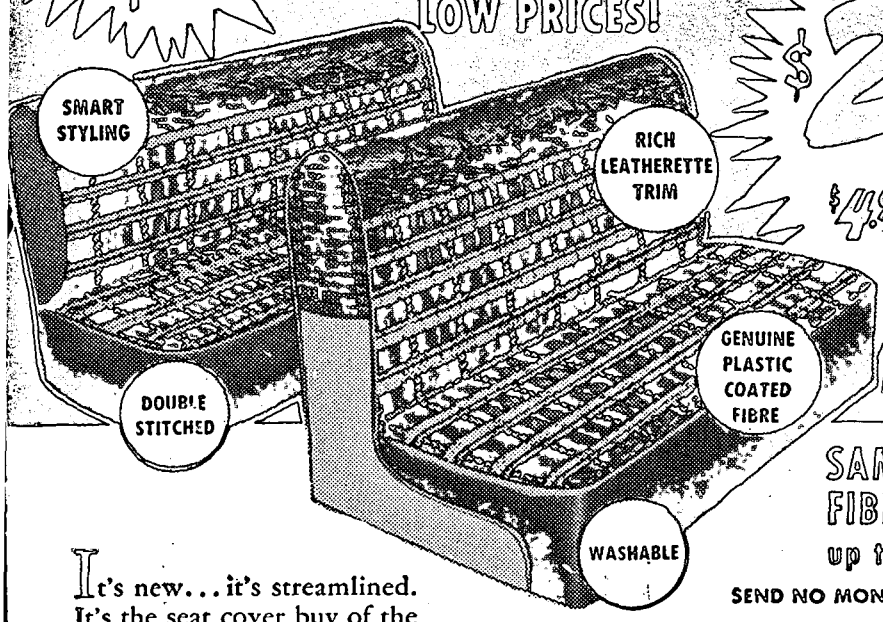

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